



FINDING MORAL HARMONY

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In a recent article, "Discord is the Harmony of the Universe", from *The Theosophist* (July 2005), John Algeo presented a very eloquent case for why *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky*, volume I, was edited in the manner that it was. This volume has been edited according to the will of the majority of the members of the board while taking into account any dissenting recommendations from any minority or minorities as best as could be done. Within the article there could also be understood a plea to all theosophists to accept the fact that there is bound to be discord in any endeavor of this nature as different factions within the Theosophical Movement move towards the Truth in their own ways. In fact discord is necessary for there to be evolution, without it there can only be stagnation. Consequently, this discord is a good thing and as theosophists we should accept what the editorial board has decided even if we do not agree with it. It is hoped that this is a fair representation thus far as to the contents of the article.

In this article there was also a characterization of certain factions of the Theosophical Movement that is untrue. The characterization is a "Straw Man" that the editorial board has created in their own mind in order to undermine any opposition. It is an unconscious lie. In the words of Algeo, the characterization goes as following:

... some Theosophists have developed a feeling about Blavatsky that exalts her

above ordinary human limitations and foibles. One of the great Blavatsky authorities and fans, Geoffrey Farthing, did not share that feeling. He wrote, in part, about the disputed letters: "These small passages relating to some of HPB's imperfections could very well have been written by her because she never in any sense regarded herself, as a personality, to be in any way perfect and was mindful of her defects and deficiencies, as indeed were the Masters' (personal letter of 25 May 2004). Yet, a purely scholarly and non-sectarian approach to the disputed letters has scandalized some good and devoted Theosophists. (*The Theosophist*, July 2005, 371)

There is not one honest defender of HPB who has claimed to deny any possibility of wrongdoing because they hold her in some sort of exalted position. Perhaps the editorial board should stick to the facts and not try to create their own where they do not exist. Despite repeated attempts, the board seems deaf to the real argument as they have neither acknowledged it nor have they tried to

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debate it. To be fair to the board, there have been other books that have come out in recent years that possess the same flaw as does *The Letters* indicating a fairly common blindness across the Theosophical Movement. Therefore, the fact that the board refuses to address the argument should not be looked upon as a sign of deception, no doubt they are unable to see the argument. On the understanding that all parties are honest and sincere, how do we make each other understand the argument?

It seems pretty clear that the editorial board is motivated by a sincere search for the truth. They do not want to arbitrarily eliminate any letter from the volume that might actually have been written by HPB. Algeo describes the editor's decision process as follows:

First, it is certainly his obligation to make clear whether each published letter is based on a copy in Blavatsky's handwriting or not. That was done in *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky*, volume 1. It is also his obligation to point to any objective evidence that the text of certain letters has been tampered with. That was also done. But furthermore it may also be seen as his obligation to enter a demur when there is a subjective reason to suspect that the available text of a letter may not be fully faithful to its no longer available original. In fact, that is implied in the published volume, as in every case in which the available text is not Blavatsky's autograph, we can suspect tampering, deliberate or accidental. (ibid., 372)

What Algeo is saying here is that any letter alleged to have been written by HPB will be printed. If there are objective reasons to believe the letter may have been tampered with in whole or in part, those reasons will be supplied along with the letter. All letters to which there is no longer an original, should be judged on their own merits by the reader. This seems to be the scholarly position as established by Algeo. Fair enough. What then is the discordant position?

The first objection is the title, "The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky". By Algeo's own admission, some of the

letters in this volume may be fake and not written by HPB at all. As he says, "it may be the case that those letters are indeed forgeries. I do not know. And neither does anyone else now living know" (ibid., 371). If he had chosen a different title that more accurately reflected the contents of the book then that would have removed one minor sore point.

What truth is the Editorial Board Pursuing?

However, that is not the important issue, the important issue is that of traducing the reputation of someone unable to defend herself. Perhaps the best way to get to the points that we are trying to present is to ask what truth the editorial board is pursuing? Do they expect to learn anything about HPB by looking at a corpus of letters, some of which may be forgeries? If so what? Certainly they cannot expect to be able to come to some real truths about HPB's life, that would be naive. According to Algeo, no living person knows if the letters in question are forgeries or not. Certainly we know that those written by Solovyoff and the Coulombs were written by established liars. There seems to be a reasonable case for this. Sometimes people lie on occasion to protect an embarrassing truth about themselves or someone else, but this does not seem to be the case with Solovyoff or the Coulombs, they are individuals of immoral character who lie for some advantage to themselves. Consequently, anything they claim cannot be trusted. That these disreputable characters are taken seriously by some in their efforts to malign an otherwise honorable woman is to be wondered at. In any event, the principle or intuition that seems to be at play is that it is unfair that disreputable people can destroy the reputation of reputable people purely on the strength of their disreputable word. How odd. But it is a reputation, and it matters a great deal.

There is an old adage that “trees are judged by their fruits.” If people were honest with themselves, they would admit that the reason that they want to know about people’s lives is that it is a shorthand way of understanding the character that motivates these lives. If the character is compromised then no doubt their work is compromised. In Blavatsky’s case, if she were morally culpable, then how could you take seriously a work founded upon the highest morality — she would be little more than a hypocrite. Her work must suffer from her character inadequacies, consequently why even look at her writings. We look at the writings of serious scholars after all, not fraudulent adventuresses. The intuition at work here is that if we can somehow undermine the character of Blavatsky, then we can decide how we want to use her work if not dismiss it outright. It gives scholars access to it in a way that they would not have otherwise. Yet is this true? Does it matter if Blavatsky is shown to be a slightly exceptional run of the mill member of humanity?

Blavatsky describes the making of a Theosophist through E.S. pledge as follows:

They have entered the inner group and pledged themselves to carry out, as strictly as they can, the rules of the occult body. This is a difficult undertaking, as the foremost rule of all is the entire renunciation of one's personality — i.e., a pledged member has to become a thorough altruist, never to think of himself, and to forget his own vanity and pride in the thought of the good of his fellow-creatures, besides that of his fellow-brothers in the esoteric circle. He has to live, if the esoteric instructions shall profit him, a life of abstinence in everything, of self-denial and strict morality, doing his duty by all men. The few real Theosophists in the T. S. are among these members. (*The Key to Theosophy*, p. 20)

While members of the T.S. have been many, real Theosophists have always been few. If they have been few, certainly HPB must be counted among them. She was a chela of Master M which would mean that she had done her 7 years of probation and shown herself to be of the highest moral fibre. She certainly would have proven herself before going to America, and thereby making all the accusations of fraud afterwards problematic. On the other hand, if Solovyoff or the Coulombs are right then HPB is a fraud. If she is a fraud then she never met any Masters or if she did then she was never accepted as a chela. Theosophy as outlined in the works of HPB describes a chain of increasingly Spiritual beings each member of the chain being helped by those just ahead of them and in turn helping those coming immediately behind. Blavatsky described her authority and understanding of Theosophy as coming from this living chain. Theosophy as described by Blavatsky is thus undermined by a moral fraud claiming to be part of a moral order, a single logical inconsistency that undermines the whole. Yet, if it is true then we must accept it. However, it is not true nor will it ever be proven to be true for the evidence does not exist, nor can it exist. The Masters cannot be proven to be not true. Blavatsky’s phenomena cannot be proven to be not true. There can be no evidence but testimony, and testimony will never be sufficient. So it is the case that the truth of these matters cannot be established and that is why the T.S. has no dogmas. As it is true that the Masters and phenomena cannot be proven or denied, they consequently cannot be used to prove any particular dogma. **It is only the individual** through his own efforts who will be able to verify the teachings as outlined by Blavatsky and the Masters.

Why are so many people unsure about Blavatsky? One answer might be that many people are attracted to Blavatsky because of the phenomena that she was reported to have performed. Carlos Aveline inspired the following analysis. Many theosophists' curiosity about HPB and phenomena has led them into doubt about many things. Phenomena cannot be proved to the mind still in the grip of the philosophy of materialism and this feeds doubt. When doubt finally gets to the point that people are actually seeking fraud in others, it is because they have had to defraud themselves. Perhaps the biggest fraud of all is to lose faith in the integrity of others where that loss of faith is due strictly to rumour. Losing faith in another due to rumour is saying, 'I do not trust myself enough to be able to handle what might come if that rumour turns out to be true.' Theosophy demands *having* faith in oneself, and *showing* faith in others. It is not a weakness to refuse to listen to rumour and innuendo about others — to engage in idle gossip. I suspect many theosophists when reading material that reintroduces old rumours and allegations turn from that material in disgust, as they would any group sitting around engaged in idle gossip. There is nothing noble or scholarly or objective about revisiting old gossip.

The Theosophical Society has three objectives. Anyone joining the Society must be inspired by at least one of the Objects or there is no point in joining. Universal brotherhood is the first and most important of these Objects. The study of comparative religion, science and philosophy, and the study of the powers latent in man are the other two. Theosophists upon joining the Society did swear to uphold certain obligations. The following is from a membership form of 1887. It is titled "Obligation" and is a signed declaration of the new member promising to, among other things,

"abstain from doing anything that may bring dishonor upon the Society, **its members**, or myself; and that to the best of my ability I will work for the furtherance of the declared objects of the Society" [emphasis mine] (*TJC*, pt.2, 193). There does not seem to be the requirement to follow *all* three Objects in the pledge, but you must be trying to further at least one. If Universal Brotherhood is not your preferred objective, you have to *at least* refrain from bringing dishonor to the Society or any of its members. I would argue that the spirit of that obligation exists today, even if members have not made such a declaration. It has passed from a written declaration to a moral one. The question then arises, does reprinting old lies and innuendo about HPB dishonor her or the Society? Is the founder of the Society a lying, cheating, fraud? A political spy? A forger? Are such qualities and pursuits honorable? This membership spells out the 'obvious' obligations of any new member lest there be any confusion. Perhaps new members to the Society today should sign similar pledges. Perhaps new members to Adyar-Wheaton still do and these members should perhaps revisit their pledges and apologize to the rest of us!

But, we are asked, what about truth? Is not Theosophy beholden to Truth above all? Truth certainly is the highest goal of any theosophist, but where is the Truth in this whole fiasco? How are unsubstantiated letters, dishonoring the Society and its Founder, symbols of Truth? If the letter can be used to establish some sort of truth, then fine use it. For instance, someone may want to print the letter and then use established facts to undermine its authenticity. There is a truth. But that is not what is happening here. The letter at this point must be viewed as possible fabricated evidence in support of spiteful slander. Where is the truth in this? There is also

the truth that until **PROVEN** otherwise, Blavatsky should be accorded the minimum respect of being viewed as an honest and honorable woman. Why would any honorable person take any other position? The truth is that when people repeat innuendo they tarnish anew the target of that innuendo. If any of the letters are true, then prove it so before you use them, because there is another fact, and that is that Blavatsky has never been convicted of any wrongdoing. Repeating innuendo and reintroducing spurious evidence is damaging to reputations, and that is a truth! That being the case, letters that are unproven and damaging have to be treated differently than other letters because they are bumping up against other truths. Finally, if you want to get some idea of the real Blavatsky, then read her works. If she is a fraud it will be revealed in her written works. If she is as she claims, it will be revealed there as well.

The truth is that the book repeats innuendo that is damaging to the Society and to HPB. The truth is that scholars should not be trading in gossip. The truth is that scholars should be establishing facts and then using those facts. The truth is that this is often very difficult. The truth is that as a consequence, scholars frequently take short cuts into the world of innuendo and trade in fabricated evidence. The truth is trading in unsubstantiated evidence is dishonorable and lazy. The truth is that HPB is a fellow theosophist. The truth is that no theosophist should do anything to knowingly dishonor her or the Society. The truth is that there exist several authors and editors who owe the Theosophical Movement an apology. The truth is that a written apology would go a long way towards achieving moral harmony within the Movement.

Robert Bruce MacDonald

This analysis of the problem confronting The Theosophical Movement, can hardly be improved upon, Later in the issue (p.14): “A Letter to a Friend” spells out the attitude position and policy of the HPB Defense Fund regarding the Volume of Letters edited by John Algeo.



India Unleashed

The Invention of the Hindu

Pankaj Mishra

Hinduism is largely a fiction, formulated in the 18th and 19th centuries out of a multiplicity of sub-continental religions, and enthusiastically endorsed by Indian modernisers. Unlike Muslims, Hindus have tended to borrow more than reject, and it has now been reconfigured as a global rival to the big three monotheisms. In the process, it has abandoned the tradition of toleration which lie in its true origins.

Pankaj Mishra
Author

EARLIER this year, I was in Rishikesh, the first town that the river Ganges meets as it leaves its Himalayan home and embarks upon its long journey through the North Indian plains. The town's place in Indian mythology is not as secure as that of Hardwar, which lies a few miles downstream, and which periodically hosts the Kumbh Mela; nor is it as famous as places like Allahabad and Benares, even holier cities further down on the Ganges. People seeking greater solitude and wisdom usually head deep into the Himalayas. With its saffron-robed *sadhus* and *ashrams*, its yoga and meditation centres, and its internet and *dosa* cafes, Rishikesh caters to a very modern kind of spiritual tourist: the Beatles came, most famously, in the sixties to learn Transcendental Meditation™ from Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Their quick disillusionment seems not to have deterred the stylishly disaffected members of the western middle class that can be found wandering the town's alleys in tie-dye outfits, trying to raise their *kundalini*

in between checking their Hotmail accounts.

I was in Rishikesh to see my aunt, who has just retired to one of the riverside ashrams. She has known a hard life; widowed when she was in her thirties, she worked in small, badly paid teaching jobs to support her three children. In my memory, I can still see her standing at exposed country bus stops in the middle of white-hot summer days. She had come to know comfort, even luxury, of sorts in later life. Her children travel all over the world as members of India's new globalised corporate elite; there are bright grandchildren to engage her at home. But she was happiest in Rishikesh, she told me, living as frugally as she had for much of her life, and devoting her attention to the end of things.

True detachment, however, seemed as difficult to achieve for her as for the spiritual seekers with email. I had only to mention the political situation—India was then threatening to attack Pakistan—for her to say, angrily: "These Muslims need to be taught a lesson. We Hindus have been too soft for too long."

In the last decade, such anti-Muslim sentiments have become commonplace among the middle class upper-caste Hindus in both India and abroad who form the most loyal constituency of the Hindu nationalist BJP.

They were amplified most recently in Gujarat during the BJP-assisted massacre in early 2002 of over a thousand Muslims. They go with a middle class pride in the international prominence of Indian beauty queens, software professionals and Hollywood films. Perhaps I wouldn't have found anything odd about my aunt's anti-Muslim passions had I not later gone up to her monastic cell, one of the several in a large quad around a flower garden, and noticed the

large garlanded poster of a well-known Sufi saint of western India.

Did she know that she revered someone born a Muslim? I don't think so. The folk religion to which the Sufi saint belongs, and which millions of Indians still practise, does not acknowledge such modern political categories as "Hindu" and "Muslim." I think the contradiction between her beliefs and practice would only be clear to the outsider: the discrepancy between the narrow nationalist prejudices she had inherited from her class and caste, and the affinities she generously formed in her inner world of devotion and prayer. It is not easily understood; but it is part of the extraordinary makeover undergone by Hinduism since the nineteenth century when India first confronted the West, and its universalist ideologies of nationalism and progress.

THE REMARKABLE quality of this transformation is partly shown by the fact that there was no such thing as Hinduism before the British invented the holdall category in the early nineteenth century, and made India seem the home of a "world religion" as organised and theologically coherent as Christianity and Islam. The concepts of a "world religion" and "religion" as we know them now, emerged during the late 18th and early 19th century, as objects of academic study, at a time of widespread secularisation in western Europe. The idea, as inspired by the Enlightenment, was to study religion as a set of beliefs, and to open it up to rational enquiry.

But academic study of any kind imposes its own boundaries upon the subject. It actually creates the subject while bringing it within the realm of the intellect. The early European scholars of religion labelled everything; they organised disparate religious practices into one system, and literally brought into

being such world religions as Hinduism and Buddhism.

Not only Hinduism, but the word Hindu itself is of non-Hindu origin. It was first used by the ancient Persians to refer to the people living near the river Indus (*Sindhu* in Sanskrit). It then became a convenient shorthand for the Muslim and Christian rulers of India; it defined those who weren't Muslims or Christians. Modern scholarship has made available much more information about the castes, religious sects, folk and elite cultures, philosophical traditions and languages that exist, or have existed, on the Indian subcontinent. But despite containing the world's third largest population of Muslims, India is still for most people outside it, a country of Hindus; even a "Hindu civilisation" as it featured in Samuel Huntington's millenarian world-view.

The persistence of such labels in the West is not just due to ignorance, or to some lingering Christian fear of unconvertible heathens. Perhaps, the urge to fix a single identity for such diverse communities as found in India comes naturally to people in the highly organised and uniform societies of the West, where cultural diversity now usually means the politically expedient and hardened identities of multiculturalism. Perhaps, people who themselves are defined almost exclusively by their citizenship in the nation-state and the consumer society cannot but find wholly alien the pre-modern world of multiple identities and faiths in which most Indians still live.

Certainly, most Hindus themselves felt little need for precise self-descriptions, except when faced with blunt questions about religion on official forms. Long after their encounter with the monotheistic religions of Islam and Christianity, they continued to define

themselves through their overlapping allegiances to family, caste, linguistic group, region, and devotional sect. Religion to them was more unselfconscious practice than rigid belief; it is partly why Indian theology accommodates atheism and agnosticism. Their rituals and deities varied greatly, defined often by caste and geography; and they were also flexible: new goddesses continue to enrich the pantheon even today. There is an AIDS goddess which apparently both causes and eradicates the disease. At any given time, both snakes and the ultimate reality of the universe were worshipped in the same region, sometimes by the same person. Religion very rarely demanded, as it did with many Muslims or Christians, adherence to a set of theological ideas prescribed by a single prophet, book, or ecclesiastical authority.

This is why a history of Hinduism, no matter how narrowly conceived, has to describe several very parochial-seeming Indian religions, almost none of which contained an evangelical zeal to save the world. The first of these — the Vedic religion—began with the nomads and pastoralists from central Asia who settled north India in the second millennium BC. It was primarily created by the priestly class of Brahmans who conducted fire sacrifices with the help of the Vedas, the earliest known Indian scriptures, in order to stave off drought and hunger. But the Brahmans who also formulated the sacred and social codes of the time wished to enhance their own glory and power rather than propose a new all-inclusive faith; they presented themselves as the most superior among the four caste groups that emerged during Vedic times and were based upon racial distinctions between the settlers and the indigenous population of north India and then on a division of labour.

A NEW RELIGION WAS also far from the minds of the Buddhists, the Jains

and many other philosophical and cultural movements that emerged in the sixth and fifth centuries BC while seeking to challenge the power of the Brahmans and of the caste hierarchy. People dissatisfied with the sacrificial rituals of the Vedic religion later grew attracted to the egalitarian cults of Shiva and Vishnu that became popular in India around the beginning of the first century AD. However, the Brahmans managed to preserve their status at the top of an ossifying caste system. They zealously guarded their knowledge of Sanskrit, esoteric texts, and their expertise in such matters as the correct pronunciation of mantras. Their specialised knowledge, and pan-Indian presence, gave them a hold over ruling elites even as the majority of the population followed its own heterodox cults and sects. Their influence can be detected in such Indian texts as the *Bhagavad-Gita* which was interpolated into the much older *Mahabharata*, and which, though acknowledging the irrelevance of ritual sacrifices, made a life of virtue, or *dharma*, inseparable from following the rules of caste.

At the same time, India remained too big and diverse to be monopolised by any one book or idea. Today, the Hindu nationalists present Muslim rulers of India as the flagbearers of an intolerant monotheism; but there was even more religious plurality during the eight centuries of Muslim presence in India. Sufism mingled with local faiths; the currently popular devotional cults of Rama and Krishna, and the network of ashrams and sects expanded fast under the Moghul empire. Medieval India furnishes more evidence of sectarian violence between the worshippers of Shiva and Vishnu than between Hindus and Muslims.

In the 18th century, the British were both appalled and fascinated by the

excess of gods, sects, and cults they encountered in India. It was a religious situation similar to the pagan chaos a Christian from the eastern provinces of the Roman empire might have encountered in the West just before Constantine's conversion to Christianity. As it turned out, like the powerful Christians in Rome, the British in India sought and imposed uniformity. There were intellectually curious men among them: a judge called William Jones founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal, whose amateur scholars began in the late 18th century to figure out the strange bewildering country the British found themselves in. Jones, a linguist, confirmed the similarity between Sanskrit and Greek. Another official, James Prinsep, deciphered the ancient Indian script of *Brahmi*, the ancestor of most Indian scripts, that the British found on pillars and rock faces across south Asia, and threw the first clear light on the first great patron of Buddhism, Ashoka. A military officer called Alexander Cunningham excavated the site near Benares where the Buddha had preached his first sermon.

These days, there is a common enough presumption, which was popularised by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, that much of western scholarship on the Orient helped, directly or not, western imperialists. Some people take it further and assert that any, or all, western interest in India is tainted with bad faith.

IT WOULD BE TOO simple to say that this great intellectual effort, to which we owe much of our present knowledge of India, was part of a colonialist or imperialist enterprise of controlling newly conquered peoples and territories. What's more interesting than the by now familiar accusations of Orientalism is how the assumptions of the earliest British scholars mingled with the prejudices of

native Indian elites to create an entirely new kind of knowledge about India.

These scholars organised their impressions of Indian religion according to what they were familiar with at home: the monotheistic and exclusive nature of Christianity. When confronted by diverse Indian religions, they tended to see similarities. These similarities were usually as superficial as those found between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. But the British assumed that different religious practices could only exist within a single overarching tradition. They also started off with a literary bias, which was partly the result of the mass distribution of texts and the consequent high degree of literacy in Europe in the eighteenth century. They thought that since Christianity had canonical texts, Indian tradition must have the same. Their local intermediaries tended to be Brahmans, who alone knew the languages—primarily Sanskrit—needed to study such ancient Indian texts as the Vedas and the Bhagavad-Gita. Together, the British scholars and their Brahman interpreters came up with a canon of sorts, mostly Brahmanical literature and ideology, which they began to identify with a single Hindu religion.

The Brahmanical literature, so systematised, later created much of the appeal of Indian culture for its foreign connoisseurs, such as the German romantics, Schopenhauer, Emerson and Thoreau. The strange fact here is that most Indians then knew nothing or very little of the hymns, invocations and liturgical formulae of the four *Vedas* or the philosophical idealism of the *Upanishads* that the British and other European scholars in Europe took to be the very essence of Indian civilisation. These Sanskrit texts had long been monopolised by an elite minority of Brahmans who zealously guarded their knowledge of Sanskrit. It was these

Brahmans who educated the British amateur scholars. So they studied earnestly the canon of what they supposed to be ancient Indian tradition and managed to remain mostly unaware of the more numerous non-textual, syncretic religious and philosophical traditions of India — for example, the popular devotional cults, Sufi shrines, festivals, rites, and legends that varied across India and formed the worldview of a majority of Indians.

But the texts provided the British the standards with which to judge the state of contemporary religion in India. Since few Indians at the time seemed capable of the sublime sentiments found in the Bhagavad-Gita and the Rig-Veda, Hinduism began to seem a degenerate religion, full of such social evils as widow-burning and untouchability, and in desperate need of social engineering: an idea that appealed both to British colonialists and their Brahman collaborators who had long felt threatened by the non-Brahmanical forms of religion that most Indians followed. It was equally convenient to blame the intrusion of Islam into India for Hinduism's fallen state, even the caste system, and to describe Hindus as apathetic slaves of Muslim tyrants: a terrible fate from which the British had apparently rescued them in order to prepare their path to a high stage of civilisation.

These ideas about the Muslim tyrants, Hindu slaves and British philanthropists were originally set out in such influential books as *History of British India*, written by James Mill, a Scottish utilitarian, and the father of John Stuart Mill. Such books now tell you more about the proselytising vigour of some enlightened Scots and utilitarians than about Indian history.

BUT THEY HAVE HAD very serious political consequences. Many

westernised upper-caste Indians, including middle class Hindu nationalists, now believe that Muslim invaders destroyed a pure and glorious Hindu civilisation, which a minority of Brahmans then managed to preserve. The rather crude British generalisation that Hindus and Muslims constituted mutually exclusive and monolithic religious communities—a view which was formed largely by historians who never visited India, such as James Mill, and which was then institutionalised in colonial policies of divide-and-rule — was eventually self-fulfilled, first, by the partition of British India, and then by the hostility between India and Pakistan.

Even at the time, these ideas had a profound impact on a new generation of upper-caste Indians, who had been educated in western-style institutions, and so were well placed to appreciate the immense power and prestige that Britain then had as the supreme economic and military nation in the world. These Indians wished to imitate the success of the British; do for India what a few enterprising men had done for a tiny island; and they found a source of nationalist pride in the newly-minted "Hinduism."

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, educated people everywhere in the colonised countries of Asia and Africa were forced into considering how their inheritance of ancient tradition has failed to save them from subjection to the modern West. This was what preoccupied such Muslim intellectuals as Mohammed Iqbal, the poet-advocate of Pakistan, the Egyptians Mohammed Abduh, the intellectual founder of modern radical Islamism, and Sayyid Qutb, the fundamentalist activist who inspired Osama Bin Laden.

These were mostly people from the middle class who were educated formally in western-style institutions and who

became the leading modernist thinkers within their respective traditions. Their most crucial encounter was with the West whose power they felt daily in their lives, and whose history they learned before they learnt anything else.

Travelling to the West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they came up against the paradox that the western nations, which were mortal enemies of each other, and brutal exploiters in their colonies, had created admirably liberal civilisations at home. They remained opposed to the colonial presence in their countries and aspired for independence. But they were also dazzled by the power and prestige of the West, and they couldn't but grapple with the complex question of how much space to give to western values of science, reason, secularism and nationalism in the traditional societies they belonged to.

THIS QUESTION BEGAN to haunt Vivekananda when in 1893 he travelled to the West for the first time in his life. Born in a middle class family in Calcutta, he was educated in western-style institutions, and was studying law, in preparation for a conventional professional career, when he met the mystic Ramakrishna Paramahansa and renounced the world to become a *sannyasi*. He travelled all across India and first exposed himself to the misery and degradation most Indians then lived in. When he travelled to the Parliament of Religions as a representative of the Hindu religion in 1893, he hoped partly to raise funds for a monastic mission in India and, more vaguely, to find the right technology for alleviating poverty in India.

The Parliament of Religions was part of a larger celebration of Christopher Columbus's so-called discovery of America. The organisers planned to "display the achievements of western

civilisation and to benefit American trade." Vivekananda addressed himself directly to such self-absorption. He spoke eloquently and enthrallingly on Hinduism in Chicago, drawing on his great knowledge of western philosophy. He claimed that it was an Indian achievement to see all religions as equally true, and to set spiritual liberation as the aim of life. Americans received his speech rapturously. He lectured on Hinduism to similarly enthusiastic audiences in other American cities.

The news of Vivekananda's success flattered insecure middle class Indians in India who wished to make Hinduism intellectually respectable to both themselves and to westerners. But Vivekananda himself, during the next few years he spent travelling in America and Europe, was to move away from an uncritical celebration of Indian religion and his hostility towards the West. He came to have a new regard for the West, for the explosion of creative energy, the scientific spirit of curiosity and the ambition that in the nineteenth century had made a small minority the masters of the world. He could barely restrain his admiration in letters home: "What strength, what practicality, what manhood!"

Vivekananda also claimed to sense a spiritual hunger in the West, which he said India was well-placed to allay. He thought that India could be Greece to the West's Rome, by offering its spiritual heritage to the West in exchange for the secret of material advancement. Together, he hoped, India and the West would lead a new renaissance of humanity.

Vivekananda returned to India after three years, his admiration for the West undiminished. He set up a monastic order devoted to social service and to reforming Hinduism which he saw as a decadent

religion. In the midst of his endeavours, he died young, at thirty-nine. Nothing much could come out of what was mostly well-intentioned rhetoric: India was too far away from the West, which was then only in the middle of its extraordinary rise. It was not up to India, then a subject country, to impose terms on anyone.

Vivekananda appeared to have struggled in his short life with many new ideas. He didn't always have clear solutions. His value lies in that he was among the first Indians to realise clearly the fact of western dominance over the world; he attested above all to the inevitability of the West's presence, if not superiority, in all aspects of human life. There were other people who had reached the same conclusion:

Europe is progressive. Her religion is....used for one day in the week and for six days her people are following the dictates of modern science. Sanitation, aesthetic arts, electricity etc are what made the Europeans and American people great. Asia is full of opium eaters, ganja smokers, degenerating sensualists, superstitious and religious fanatics.

This could be either Vivekananda or Iqbal. It is actually Angarika Dharampala, the greatest figure of modern Buddhism. Born in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) in 1864, Dharampala was just a year younger than Vivekananda. He even went to the Parliament of Religions in Chicago as a representative of Buddhism but was more prominent than his Indian colleague. Like Vivekananda, Dharampala was influenced by the West, particularly by the Protestant missionaries that came with British rule over Sri Lanka, and came to denounce traditional religion in Sri Lanka as corrupt and unmanly. He wished to modernise Buddhism and also give it a political role. Following these contradictory desires, he became an anti-colonial nationalist, and

the major icon of the Sinhalese nationalism that later brought Sri Lanka to civil war in the 1980s.

COMPARED TO SUCH Hindu and Buddhist modernists as Vivekananda and Dharampala, the Muslim intellectuals were more divided in their attitudes towards the West. Some of them, such as the young Turkish intellectuals of early twentieth century, wished totally to remake their countries along western lines so as to reach the summit of power and affluence that the West had arrived at. There were many others who chose the way of suspicion or antipathy. Iqbal stressed the need of Indian Muslims to form their own state where they could follow Islam in its most spiritual form and be able to resist the material ways of the West. Qutb advocated a return to the Koran and preached revolutionary violence against the West and its values that he saw incarnated in Arab nation-states.

But whether choosing nationalism or revolution, almost all of these intellectuals from colonised countries seemed to concede that the West had become the best source of ideas about effecting large-scale change and organising human society. They admitted the need for modernisation even in the sphere of religion and for cultivating a rational and scientific outlook.

ONLY A TINY MINORITY of upper-caste Indians had known much about the *Bhagavad-Gita* or the *Vedas* until the eighteenth century when they were translated by British scholars and then presented as sacred texts from the paradisiacal age of something called "Hinduism." But in the nineteenth century, movements dedicated to reforming Hinduism and recovering its lost glory grew very rapidly. The inspiration or rhetoric of these neo-Hindu movements might have seemed archaic. In fact, they were largely inspired by the

ideas of progress and development that British utilitarians and Christian missionaries aggressively promoted in India. Modernist intellectuals in Muslim countries then exposed to European imperialism similarly absorbed western influences, but their distrust of the Christian and secular West was deeper.

Unlike Muslims, the Hindus tended to borrow more than reject. Ram Mohun Roy (1772-1932), who is often called the "father of modern India," was a Unitarian. He founded the Brahma Samaj, a reformist society that influenced the poet Rabindranath Tagore and filmmaker Satyajit Ray, among other leading Indian intellectuals and artists, as part of an attempt to turn Hinduism into a rational, monotheistic religion. The social reformer Dayananda exhorted Indians to return to the Vedas, which contained, according to him, all of modern science, and echoed British missionary denunciations of such Hindu superstitions as idol-worship and the caste system. Even the more secular and catholic visions of Gandhi and Nehru — the former a devout Hindu, the latter an agnostic — accepted the premise of a "Hinduism: that had decayed and had to be reformed.

Gandhi drew his political imagery from popular folklore; it made him more effective as a leader of the Indian masses than the upper caste Hindu politicians who relied upon a textual, or elite Hinduism. But it was Swami Vivekananda who in his lifetime was witness to, and also mostly responsible for, the modernisation of Hinduism. Vivekananda was the middle-class disciple of the illiterate mystic Ramakrishna Paramahansa; but he moved very far away from his Guru's inward-looking spirituality in his attempt to make Hinduism, or the invention of British and Brahman scholars, intellectually respectable to both Westerners and westernised Indians. In his lectures in

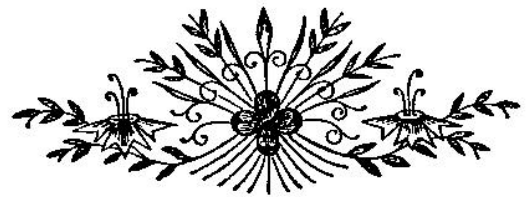
England and America, where he acquired a mass following, he presented India as the most ancient and privileged fount of spirituality — a line that many Indian Gurus were profitably to take with their western disciples. At the same time, he exhorted Hindus to embrace western science and materialism in order to shed their burden of backwardness and constitute themselves into a manly nation.

Vivekananda borrowed from both British-constructed Hinduism and European realpolitik. In doing so he articulated the confused aggressive desires of a westernised Indian bourgeoisie that was then trying to find its identity. But his ambition of regenerating India with the help of western techniques did not sunder him entirely from the folk religious traditions he had grown up in. He remained a mystic; and his contradictory rhetoric now seems to prefigure the oddly split personality of the modern Hindu, where devotion to a Muslim saint can co-exist with an anti-Muslim nationalism.

HIS IMPORTANCE DOESN'T END THERE. The marriage of Indian religiosity and western materialism Vivekananda tried to arrange makes him the perfect patron saint of the BJP, a political party of mostly upper caste middle class Hindus that strives to boost India's capabilities in the fields of nuclear bombs and information technology and also reveres the cow as holy. A hundred years after his death, the BJP has come closest to realising his project of westernising Hinduism into a nationalist ideology: one which has pretensions to being all-inclusive, but which demonises Muslims and seeks to pre-empt with its rhetoric of egalitarianism the long overdue political assertion of India's lower caste groups.

Vivekananda's modern-day disciples are helped considerably by the fact that the Indian bourgeoisie is no longer small and insignificant. It is growing — the

current numbers are between 150-200 million. There are millions of rich Indians living outside India. In America, they constitute the richest minority. It is these affluent, upper caste Indians in India and abroad who largely bankrolled the rise to power of Hindu nationalists, and who now long for closer military and economic ties between India and western nations. The new conditions of globalization — free trade, faster communications — help them work faster towards the alliance Vivekananda proposed between an Indian elite and the modern West. As a global class, they are no less ambitious than the one which in the Roman empire embraced Christianity and made it an effective tool of worldly power. Hinduism in their hands has never looked more like the Christianity and Islam of Popes and Mullahs, and less like the multiplicity of unselfconsciously tolerant faiths it still is for most Indians. Their growing prominence suggests that Vivekananda may yet emerge as more influential in the long run than Gandhi, Nehru or Tagore — the three great Indian leaders, whose legacy of liberal humanism middle class India already seems to have frittered away as it heads for intellectually and spiritually oppressive times.¹



LETTER TO A FRIEND

Dear -----

¹ PANKAJ MISHRA: Author. Regular contributor to the New York Review of Books, The New Statesman and the Times Literary Supplement as well as several Indian publications.

As you have expressed admiration for Brother John Algeo's stated editorial policy in his July article of the *Adyar Theosophist*: "Discord is the Harmony of the Universe," let me state the position of the HPB Defense Fund regarding this article:

1. You cannot be a Spiritual Teacher on Monday and a Fraud on Wednesday. The rules of spiritual growth taught by the Masters forbid it, the economy of nature forbids it.
2. Brother John's editorial policy is **dishonest** because his volume is entitled, *Letters of Madame Blavatsky*. If it had been entitled *Letters, Both Probable and Improbable of Madame Blavatsky*, this would have been honest.
3. Brother John is pitting himself against history, in that his editorial policy considers Solovyoff a truth purveyor and history has said Solovyoff is a known liar. The evidence is specific, very definite, and abundant. Brother John's article says, in effect, that HE KNOWS BETTER.
4. The HPB Defense Fund was initiated to produce a volume without the series of letters by a known liar, produced after HPB's death, of which **no** original manuscript exists.
5. All of the *Volume I Letters* edited by John now in circulation and yet to get into circulation are a direct attack on the **integrity** of H. P. Blavatsky. By "integrity" we mean the *minimum* moral standard required of an initiated Chela — one praised by both Masters, **in writing**.
6. When Brother John says he thinks the Russian Spy Letter (#7) is

"probably true" he is also **saying** he thinks H. P. Blavatsky is "probably a fraud."

7. Editing with no respect for the subject under consideration drags all arguments to the lowest level and exalts the editor into a discriminative genius that can override both the known history of H. P. Blavatsky and the known history of Solovyoff.

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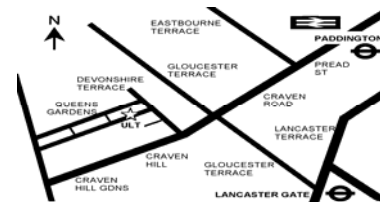
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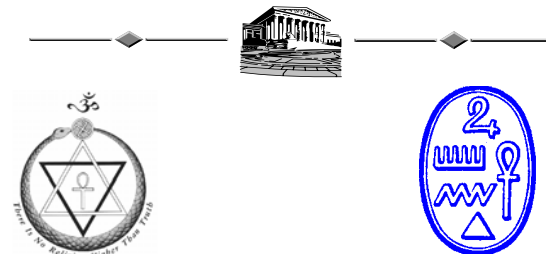
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Master's letter to Mr. Judge

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Subscribers ASK:

Question: — Why should theosophists help defend HPB against the personal attack to her published by the Adyar Publishing House? Shouldn't we just ignore them and keep business as usual? What is the importance of defending a sacred teacher? And, if we must act, what can we do in practical terms?

Answer — Questions of this sort must be answered by each in the precinct of his own Conscience. Questions like "How much...? What...? How far...? How long? Are all problems each has to work out for themselves. "What we do in practical terms is again a problem each must work out within the framework of his own vision. Have the writings of Madame Blavatsky changed your life for the better? If not, then the problem is answered. If the answer is "yes," then the problem of defending one to whom you are in debt cannot be passed over lightly — especially is this so if you have experienced spiritual growth at the hands of Theosophy. She,

being the mother of Theosophy in its most recent expression to the Western World cannot be passed over lightly as a problem of small concern. The Gurumparampara Chain can be compared to a group of humans passing buckets of water to stop a blazing fire — no unit is unimportant.

Question: — Is there a connection between the seven planets and the seven rays, and to the fact that everything is septenary in the universe? If there is, what connection may that be?

Answer: — It would require books to answer that question. One or two ideas might be thinking points.

What is hot metaphysically is cold physically. Blue is considered a cold color but in vibration it is fast. At least the blue stars are "hot" compared to the "red" ones

The ancient Egyptians painted the sun as Blue and HPB confirms the wisdom of their decision. Blue Stars usually have the fastest vibration. Seven planets and seven rays, seven musical notes and seven colors to the spectrum are matters of great concern to the psychically minded seeker. T. Subba Row wrote a long article defending the idea of man having "Seven Principles: "The Aryan-Arhat Esoteric Tenets on the Sevenfold Principle in Man." (The Theosophist Vol. III, #4; also reprinted in *Five Years of Theosophy*, pp. 153-184, Theosophy Company 1980)

"To live to benefit mankind" gradually leads us to a deeper knowledge of the seven rays of the spectrum, the seven races of man, the seven metaphysical groupings of Adepts and Mankind, the seven sound, etc., etc.

Question: — In what sense, if any, can our friends Daniel Caldwell and John Algeo be still considered theosophists? After all, there is a difference between being

acquainted with the literature and being a theosophist, is there not? What is the practical lesson in that, for each of us?

Answer: — We are living in a **UNITY** Taking that into consideration “exclusion” is not an option. They are theosophists in every sense. Karmic law does the “picking” and “choosing” in matters such as this. We have to be honest and defend those things we think are worth defending. Those who are unable to defend themselves should be defended. Being theosophical students beholdens us to defend those who have helped our will power and clarified our discrimination and goaded our sense of responsibility. We may have a lineage on the physical plane, but we also have one on the psychic and spiritual plane. Brother John Algeo in his recent seven page article: “Discord is the Harmony of the universe” intends to expand the editorial Committee for Volume II of H. P. Blavatsky’s *Letters*. If it fairs better than that of Volume I, there may be no need for an HPB Defense Fund to produce an honest volume II.¹ As it is the Fund is fortunate enough to have passed the halfway mark on its way the necessary \$10,000 for publishing a alternative volume. Our thanks to the great land of Plato and also to that of Mahatma Gandhi for recent nudges onward! This Fund has been a great eye-opener in showing that there are “secret sacrificers” all around the globe who take Theosophy in *Dead Earnest*.

Question: — How can a study group best manage the three gunas — *tamas rajas, satwa* — in the theosophical work? How to avoid the excess of *tamas*? And the excess of *rajas*?

Answer: All human efforts are stained with faults. It is so with us, the Deva Egos — we play the music too fast, or we

drone its notes too slow, or do we on the off-chance hit that happy medium of a pleasing melody? Not too sweet, not too pungent, not too spaced, nor yet so slithery that even the snake himself is aghast!

Do the best you can — and keep the percentage of the “doing” as high as possible and your own Aspirations will come to your aid and all end well, as the key to the tumblers in the lock.

Question: — The fact is well established that in her Third Volume of *The Secret Doctrine* HPB intended to study the lives of Initiates. One of the probable reasons for that is that life examples inspire. So, following on that unsequed line of work, would it not be correct for us to study in a more open way the great theosophists, Robert Crosbie, John Garrigues and others, so that we can feel inspired by the practical examples of people who were totally committed to the Cause and who succeeded in preserving the teaching and the community of learners?

As an “aspect of the Unknowable” we need not apologize for any effort we make to benefit mankind. If it was seeded in the bosom of that *motive*, the best defender we will ever need is already at hand.

The two names you mention would be considered a HUGE ASSUMPTION by many theosophists. I suspect they themselves would take exception to the choice. The heart’s fair secrets are just that and need remain lest our ship leave the ocean of brotherhood into the bypaths and rivers of sectarianism. Caution with the still living and the recent dead gives one a chance for distance, objectivity and clear perspective.

Even with the great distance, say, between us and Gautama Buddha, are we able to understand with justice and impersonality the whole story? His Father was scandalized to have a son

¹ For further details on this moot point, see “Letter to a Friend” on page-----, — Ed., A.T.

dressed in rags begging from door-to-door. His wife and child must have hoped they would stay together as a family. Karma is watching the entire symphony from the first note to the last.

We lead the best life we are capable and try to end pernicious habit of judging and "peering about."

The "Community of Learners" can be grateful in retrospect that human heroes lived their lives the way they did, but don't be so blind as to think that no toes got bruised along the way.

ANON



COMMENTARY

ANALYSIS OF SOME WRITINGS AND RADIO TALKS OF ALLAN W. WATTS

— by Willem B. Roos

This article is reprinted from Victor Endersby's *Theosophical Notes* of February 1958. It shows Mr. Roos not only an excellent scholar but a great humanist as well. It was he who discovered the 2nd portion of Jasper Niemand's article, "The Sleeping Spheres" We reprinted the articles along with the story behind their discovery in Vol. III, #9, July 2003. Part II was published in the July Supplement.

(Editor's Note:¹ The following article, which has also been printed in the *Golden Lotus*, was submitted to us some months ago, and has been regrettably delayed by various circumstances. The subject is the advocacy of Tantra Yoga by Mr. Watts, which considerably startled students of Oriental philosophy, of whom Mr. Roos

¹ This is Victor Endersby's "Introductory Note" to the article.

is one of the most able known to us. Mr. Roos deals with the subject mainly from the scholarly and philosophical point of view. Following his article, we plan to extend the subject to what may be called the spontaneous and endemic tantricism, tendencies which are found in all countries, usually under a more frank guise than the tantricism which is peddled in this country as from the Orient, by various wily characters.)

Mr. Alan W. Watts is the author of a number of books dealing with *Zen* and related subjects. He also conducts the series of radio talks over the Berkeley FM stations KPFA and KPFB, under the general title "Philosophy East and West." His latest book, which has just been published, is called *The Way of Zen*, and is intended as stated by the author in the Preface "both for the general reader and for the more serious student..." (#1, p. xv)

When in the following discussion I use the word "Zen" unqualified, it shall always be with reference to the *pseudo Zen* of the so-called "Sixth Patriarch," Hui-neng², and more especially to the Western version, represented so typically by Watts. For the

² According to the *Voice of the Silence*, the Sixth Patriarch was Shin sien who taught that the human mind is like a mirror which attracts and reflects every atom of dust and has to be, like that mirror, watched over and dusted every day. Shin-Sien was the sixth Patriarch of North China, who taught the Esoteric Doctrine of *Bodhidharma* (P. 28fn, Theosophy Company edition, 1987). — *Ed., A.T.*

sake of the *real Zen* of Bodhidharma and Shen-hsiu (Shin-Sien?). I sincerely hope that some day a competent scholar will arise to expose the false pretensions of modern Zen and restore to the world the genuine teachings of Bodhidharma.

The purpose of the present analysis is to show the falsity of a number of statements on Western philosophy, made by Watts over the radio as well as in his book *The Way of Zen*. He has made it a point to put the whole of eastern Philosophy into his own "Zen straight jacket," using every means at his disposal to achieve this object. While this was bad enough for the good name of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, he outdid himself in his radio talk over KPFA and KPFB, last Easter Sunday at 8 PM, [1957] when he approvingly spoke on certain, highly demoralizing, left hand tantric practices. A friend of mine has taken down *verbatim* this talk, and made mimeograph copies, to which I shall refer hereafter as #2.

I let now follow a summary of the characteristics of the "Zen straight jacket" which I shall discuss in this paper:

1. The "sudden enlightenment" (*satori*) of Zen, which Watts equates with the Hindu and Buddhist conception of "liberation" (*Moksa, nirvana*, etc.), insisting that this is realized without any preparation or means, and is not the result of a specific search.

(Note: The key to the reference numbers is given at the end of the pa-

per.)

2. A subtle hostility towards asceticism and even towards general moral laws. This manifests in some of his distorted interpretations of Eastern teachings and mistranslations of Sanskrit words.

3. The taking of rebirth merely in a figurative way, as a process occurring each moment, and not requiring acceptance of a special theory of survival.

4. Rejection of, and animosity towards scholarship, a characteristic which can be traced back to the unlearned rustic Hui-neng, the self-proclaimed successor of Hung-jen. How Watts attempts to fit Hinduism and Buddhism into the above enumerated characteristics will now be shown by quoting his own words:

Point 1

"...SAHAJA is the natural state. It lies at the very height of spirituality — at the terminal point past the practice of all types of discipline, ascetic and otherwise; where a person has achieved the final liberation — the state of moksha,... But he realizes it without means — without any special devices — without anything in particular that he has to remember to do, he has it absolutely naturally..." (#2, p. 3)

"...mystical union is never something which we can experience as the result of a specific search..." (#2, p. 6)

But as Watts is well aware of the existence of an enormous Eastern literature advocating not only this search — but indicating and teaching the very means to reach Moksa, the declared object of the six principal systems of Hindu philosophy (the six darsanas), he very ingeniously continues:

"The *only* reason why, in the various mystical systems of the world, an attitude of searching is sometimes advocated, is that we may in a very concrete way experience the futility of searching..." (#2, p. 6)

(Of course all underlining [*italicizing*] in #2¹ is mine, while the punctuation is mainly that of my friend.) Note his grossly biased statements, underlined by me, which are clearly calculated to give his listeners a *completely false* view on this matter. In the East whole libraries are filled with books dealing with this search. The Tibetan Kanjur of 108 volumes and the Tanjur of 225 volumes deal with this, to most of the Northern Buddhists, all important subject of how to obtain liberation.

His description of how Gautama attained to enlightenment under the Bodhi tree is typical of his constant belittlement of the achievement itself and of suggesting it to be the same as satori:

"...The evening before his awakening he simply 'gave up,' relaxed his ascetic diet, and ate some nourishing food.

"Thereupon he felt at once that a profound change was coming over him. He sat beneath the tree, vowing never to rise until he had attained the supreme awakening, and — according to tradition — sat all through the night until the first glimpse of the morning star suddenly (sic: WER) provoked a state of perfect clarity and understanding. This was... liberation from *Maya* and from the everlasting round of birth-and-death (samsara)... " (#1, p. 45)

Note the words "he simply 'gave up,'" and "suddenly provoked" and the total omission of his struggle with Mara.

But Watts also informs us in his talk over KPFA, entitled "The Head of a Dead Cat" (March 3, 1957), that he himself, has attained this supreme state:

"When this first happened to me I expected all kinds of results from it, which is why it went away; I expected it to change my character, to make me better, stronger, wiser and happier. (But, apparently, it did not — WER) ...what I have found so marvelous is that I can not get rid of this Unity, this Tao, even by seeking for it..."

Compare this with the following by D.T. Suzuki, quoted by E. Steinilber-Oberlin:

¹ We do not have a copy of what Mr. Roos distributed in mimeographed form: namely, a verbatim report of the talk. Throughout the essay it is referenced as #2. — Ed., A.T.

"When *satori* is real (for there are many shams), its effects on moral spiritual life provoke in us a complete revolution capable of elevating our soul, and of purifying us, as well as exacting much of us morally." (*The Buddhist Sects of Japan*, pp. 153-54)

Of course, Watt's perpetual *satori* is in line with his definition of the state of *samadhi* as:

"... a state of profound peace. This is not the stillness of total inactivity, for, once the mind returns to its natural state, *samadhi* persists at all times, in walking, standing, sitting, and lying..." (#1, p. 53)

Well, I suppose this is news, and *good* news, for all the Raja-Yogis and Jivanmuktas of the past and present, and also for Patanjali, the celebrated author of the *Yoga Sutras*. Of course, no use asking Watts to furnish us with references, after he writes: "...Zen is simply inaccessible to the purely literary and scholarly approach..." (#1, p. xii)

And for once I agree with him, but would propose to add that it is also inaccessible to the logical mind.

Point 2:

His hostility towards asceticism and moral laws is at the basis of most of his talks and writings. It will suffice to discuss some of the passages from his book *The Way of Zen*.

"...Far Eastern Buddhism is more palatable and 'according to nature' than its Indian and Tibetan counter-

parts, with ideals of life which seem at times to be superhuman, more suited to angels than to men. Even so, all forms of Buddhist subscribe to the Middle Way between the extremes of angel (*deva*) and demon (*preta*), ascetic and sensualist, and claim that supreme "awakening" or Buddhahood can be attained only from the human state. (#1, p. 30)

This is a typical mixture of truth and falsehood, intended to condemn asceticism. Now, in the *Samyutta-nikaya* the Buddha declares the two extremes to be:

"...That conjoined with passions, low, vulgar, common, ignoble and useless, and that conjoined with self-torture, painful, ignoble, and useless. Avoiding these two extremes the Tathagata has gained the knowledge of the Middle Way, which gives sight and knowledge, and tends to calm, to insight, enlightenment, *nirvana*.

"What, O monks, is the Middle Way, which gives sight...? It is the noble Eightfold Path, namely right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration..." (#3, p. 274)

It will be seen that Watts interprets one of the "extremes" as asceticism, instead of self-mortification or self-torture, as stated by the Buddha. Watt's interpretation would make all ascetic rules superfluous, as is indeed his aim. But Buddha teaches the need of a true asceticism, of a real preference for a life of detachment from

worldly enjoyments:

"Right resolves are the resolve to renounce the world and to do no hurt or harm." (#3, p. 277)

"Thus perceiving, monks, the learned noble disciple feels loathing for the body, for feeling, for perception, for the aggregates, for consciousness (i.e. for the five skandhas — WER). Feeling disgust he becomes free from passion, through freedom from passion he is emancipated." (#3, p. 281)

The whole Mahayana literature is dedicated to the ideal of the Bodhisattva, who... "must practice the six or ten *paramitas* (Perfections)... (#4, p. 194) The very important *Paramita* is: "Cila (virtuous conduct, morality, righteousness)." (#4, p. 168) Mr. Watts should know that: "...A Buddhist without cila is an impostor, and he can be neither a layman nor a monk." (#4, p. 194)

About the "Noble eightfold Path" Watts has his own opinion:

"...the Eightfold Path of the Buddha's Dharma... Each section of the path has a name preceded by the word *samyak* (Pali: *samma*), which has the meaning of 'perfect' or 'complete'.... We therefore have:

"1. *Samyak-drishta*, or complete view

"2. *Samyak-samkalpa*, or complete understanding

"3. *Samyak-vak*, or complete (i.e. truthful) speech

"4. *Samyak-karmanta*, or complete action

"5. *Samyagajiva*, or complete vocation

"6. *Samyag-vyayama*, or complete application

"7. *Samyak-smritti*, or complete recollection

"8. *Samyak-samadhi*, or complete contemplation....." (#1, p. 51)

Sanskrit words generally have more than one meaning, depending upon a number of factors, e.g., the epoch, the school to which the writing belongs, the subject treated, etc. *Samyak* or *samyag* has rarely the meaning of "perfect" or "complete." Only in combination with *sambodhi* is it rendered as "perfect" (enlightenment) by Franklin Edgerton in his *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* (p. 582), while he gives as general meaning "right, proper" (ibid.) Monier Williams gives the general meaning as "right" (*Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 1181) and so does Nyanatiloka in his *Buddhist Dictionary*. (p. 81) Going through my own library I find the following authors using the word "right" to precede the name of the Path: Sir Edwin Arnold, Dwight Goddard, T.W. Rhys Davids, L.D. Barnett, Kurt F. Leidecker, Narada Thera, Paul Carus, Wm. M. McGovern, Edward J. Thomas, Lord Chalmers, Nyanaponika, L. Austine Waddell, Ling-tsit Chan [?], H.S. Ol-

cott, F.L. Woodward [?], W.Y. Evans-Wentz. I have not found authors using any other expression than "right," except Chu Cha'n, who translates it as "correct."

The difference between "complete" and "right" is very great and obvious. The first word does not give to the Path a moral value, while the second clearly makes a moral issue of it. Watts leaves us no doubt as to what he is driving at. On the next page (#1, p. 52) he writes:

"The sections dealing with action (he refers to *karma*, of course. — WER) are often misunderstood because they have a deceptive similarity to a "system of morals." Buddhism does not share the Western view that there is a moral law, enjoined by God or by nature, which it is man's duty to obey. The Buddha's precepts are voluntarily assumed rules of expediency (sic!)...."

We know already that Zen does not encourage the use of logic, but any serious student of Buddhism, not intoxicated by Zen, would agree that Buddha's precepts are not arbitrary rules, but are precisely expressions of moral laws inherent in Nature, known collectively as KARMA.

Point 3:

Watt's opinion on rebirth is not his own invention, but is, unfortunately, that held by some later Mahayana sects, as a result of the misun-

derstood *anatman* doctrine. Of course, the taking of rebirth in "a more figurative way, as that process of rebirth is from moment to moment, so that one is being reborn so long as one identifies himself with a continuing ego which reincarnates itself afresh at each moment of time" (#1, p. 49) is very convenient for those who claim to have experienced "sudden enlightenment" without having passed through the long and arduous stages of discipline which a Bodhisattva has to pass through and which require a great many successive lives. However only the literal taking of rebirth, as meaning a continuation of the same stream (*santana*) of causes and effects, associated with the same *alaya-vijnana* in a new incarnation, is consistent with the other teachings of Buddha, more especially those related to *Karma* and to the *Bodhisattva path*. It is also consistent with the Hindu viewpoint and with Hindu teachings on liberation (*moksha*) and on the "means" (*upaya*.) It is even held by Hui-neng, who speaking to a large gathering, said:

"...Today I have had the honor of meeting Your Highness, and you, officials, monks and nuns, Taoists and laymen, in this great assembly. I must ascribe this good fortune to our happy connection in previous kalpas, as well as to our common accumulated merits in making offerings to various Buddhas in our past incarnations. Otherwise we would have had no chance of hearing the teachings of the "sudden" School of Cha'an and thereby laying the foundation of our

present success in understanding the Dharma." (Sutra spoken by the Sixth Patriarch, #5, p. 507)

Point 4:

While it is true that certain metaphysical truths can only be expressed in paradoxes, this method has been misapplied to the extreme in Zen. However, I must limit my analysis to the statements made by Watts, which follow faithfully the *irrational* pattern set by the Zen masters. The following is typical of his extravagant and unscholarly methods:

"...I cannot represent myself as a Zenist, or even as a Buddhist, for this seems to me to be like trying to wrap up and label the sky. I cannot represent myself as a scientifically objective academician, for with respect to Zen — this seems to me to be like studying birdsong in a collection of stuffed nightingales. I claim no right to speak of Zen...." (#1, p. xiv)

Next he manifests a strange and unexpected animosity towards precision in transliteration from the Devangari script:

"Scholarly readers will have to excuse me for not writing absurd diacritical marks in romanized Sanskrit words, since these are merely confusing to the general reader and unnecessary to the Sanskritist..." (#1, p. xvi)

But he does not call absurd the

diacritical marks he uses to romanize Chinese. (#1, p. xvii) Why this partiality?

He does other strange things with Sanskrit. On p. 34 (#1) he translates "Neti" by "No" when *neti* is a euphonic combination of *na* plus *iti*, meaning "not this," or "not in this manner." Furthermore he derives incorrectly the noun *Manas* (mind) from "...the same root as maya..." (#1, p. 42) and the latter he derives, correctly this time, from "...matr-, 'to measure, form, build..." (#1, p.39) Watts seems to reject the common opinion of scholars that *manas* is derived from the Sanskrit root *man* = to think. In Apte's *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* one can find:

"manas n. (manyate 'nena...) 1. The mind..." (p. 739) The sentence in parenthesis says "with this (anena) one thinks (manyate).

As a final example of Watt's unsupported statements with which few, if any, scholars will agree, I quote the following:

"Zen Buddhism is a way and a view of life... It is not religion or philosophy; it is not a psychology or a type of science. It is an example of what is known in India and China as a 'way of liberation,' and is similar in this respect to Taoism, Vedanta and Yoga..." (#1, p. 3)

"Taoism is, then, the original

Chinese way of liberation which combined with Indian Mahayana Buddhism to produce Zen. It is a liberation from convention (sic!) and of the creative power of *te*." (#1, p. 28)

The last sentence seems to express more subtly the left-hand Tantric position, discussed by Watts in his radio talk on sex. (#2, which I shall now discuss.)

Tantra as Conceived by Alan W. Watts:

My attention was first drawn when Watts said:

"...it prompts me to introduce some insights from Eastern philosophy about the very nature of sexuality, regarded as itself a process of growth..." (#2, p. 2)

The general expression "Eastern Philosophy" is typical of the "straight jacket" method by which Watts misleads his audience. The most important "Eastern philosophies" preach celibacy before marriage and continence during married life. The expression "process of growth" he repeats, slightly modified as follows:

"...in both the Tantric and Taoist conceptions of the relationship between man and woman, both love at the emotional and spiritual level, and sexuality at the physical level... are looked upon emphatically as activities of growth, if they are to be genuine

and real..." (#2, p.5)

Well, if this is true, it is too bad for both Tantricism and Taoism, and to call this "natural" (#2, p. 3) is perverting the true meaning of the word. The Tantric rituals are wholly unnatural, and their effects upon the deluded devotees are so pernicious, as to lead gradually to idiocy if persisted in for a long time. Compare Watts' enthusiasm for this Tantric business with Ananda's answer to Buddha, when he was asked by the latter "...what was it that... most influenced you to forsake all worldly pleasures and enabled you to cut asunder your youthful sexual cravings?"

Ananda replied "...when anyone becomes inflamed by sexual passion, his mind becomes disturbed and confused, he loses self-control and becomes reckless and crude. Besides, in sexual intercourse, the blood becomes inflamed and impure and adulterated with impure secretions. Naturally from such a source, there can never originate an aureole of such transcendently pure and golden brightness as I have seen emanating from the person of my Lord. It was because of this that I admired my Lord and it was this that influenced me to become one of thy true followers." (The *Suran-gama Sutra*, pp. 111-112)

Watts has still more to say about sexual activity:

"The Tantra is a movement in Indian philosophy which was very greatly concerned with sexuality, which, in fact, *used sexual activity as*

a form of Yoga, as a form of *spiritual development, Tantra towards liberation.*" (#2, p. 3)

This is not only contrary to the *Surangama Sutra*, but is even inconsistent with Watts' claim that a person realizes liberation "...without means - without any special devices - without anything particular..." (#2, p. 3)

Now let us examine what is known about the Tantras. In the *Encyclopedia of Religions* (Edited by Fermi, Philosophical Library) it says under *Tantras*:

"Relatively late sacred writings of Hinduism... They are used particularly by the Shivaite sects, especially the Shaktas who worship the female principle of the universe... The practices of the lefthand *saktis* are abhorrent to the moral sense of most Hindus today..." (p. 761)

"... The worship of the lefthand shaktas is held in secret and is orgiastic in character." (p. 707)

And the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (11th Edition) says:

"...the Saktas divide themselves into two distinct groups, according to whether they attach the greater importance to the male or female principle; viz. the *Dakshinacharis*, or 'right-hand-observers' (also called *Dakshina-marvis*, or followers 'of the right-hand path') and the *Vamacharis*, or 'of the left path')..."

"The principal seat of Sakta wor-

ship is the north-eastern part of India - Bengal, Assam and Behar. The great majority of its adherents profess to follow the right-hand practice... amongst the adherents of the left-hand mode of worship... only an extreme section — the so-called *Kaulas* or *Kulinas*, persist in carrying on the mystic and licentious rites taught in many of the Tantras. But strict secrecy being enjoined in the performance of these rites, it is not easy to check any statement made on this point..." (Vol. XIII, p. 511)

But Watts *knows* and *approves* of these rites, and adduces the most absurd arguments to sustain his point:

"...People who followed tantric practices were anything but promiscuous. Their relationship was, if not with their *legal* wives, with a special partner with whom they had an *essentially monogamous* (sic!) *spiritual relationship*..." (#2, p. 3)

"...the sexual relationship... in Tantra... refers to a style... which we would say is natural... In contradistinction to artificial or contrived..." (#2, p. 3)

"Well now, in both the Tantric and Taoist conceptions of the relationship between man and woman, both love at the emotional and spiritual level, and sexuality at the physical level... are looked upon emphatically as activities of growth, if they are to be genuine and real."

In other words, one would not and could not go out with the specific intention of seeking a love partner in this type of relationship — one would simply have to come to you — as a matter of surprise... (#2, p. 5)

Notice that Watts does not explain how the "love partner" can come to one without having "the specific intention of seeking"! Or is the blessed "naturalness" only limited to one of the partners? Nor does he explain in what consists the special virtue of not seeking for something — but letting it happen and thereby regress to the level of animal consciousness:

"... the sexual process, the sexual rhythm.... shall not be something forced, shall not be sought after, but shall simply happen in its own way..." (#2, p. 5)

This whole idea is an obsession which makes Watts look at everything in one single monochromatic color. From sexual activity to moksa, everything must yield to his single formula: *Not to seek for it —not to make any effort.*

Watts' reference to the "Yab-Yum" statues in support of his arguments, induces me to quote from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, by Dr. W.Y. Evans-Wentz:

"...The Tantrics — like the ancient Egyptians — exalt right knowledge of the reproductive processes, as no doubt it should be exalted, to the level of a religious science; and in

this science... the union of the male and female principles of nature, in what is called in Tibetan the *yab* (Skt. *deva*) - *yum* (Skt. *Shakti*) attitude, symbolizes completeness, or at-onement. Power, symbolized by the male... and Wisdom, symbolized by the female... are said, esoterically, to be ever in union.

"It is much to be regretted that actual abuse of Tantric doctrines due either to wilful perversion or, as is commonly the case, to misunderstanding, resulting in practices (like those of certain decadent sects of individuals in India) improperly called Tantric, by non-initiates in America and Europe, in some instances under the aegis of organized societies, have brought upon Tantricism undeserved odium..." (footnote p. 218)

What is most surprising in Watts' talk is that he starts out with a point well taken, viz., the fact that in the West the idea of sin is connected with the sexual act — which idea he rightly condemns. But then, he immediately proceeds advocating a sexual activity, which in the eyes of the East — at least — is considered unnatural and unlawful — namely its performance *not* for the purpose of procreation of offsprings, as intended by NATURE, but for the mere gratification of delights and pleasures by methods "...where the sexual relationship between man and woman was raised to heights which have rarely been found elsewhere, except perhaps among the Taoists in China..." (#2, p. 3)

It is my opinion that it is exactly the abuse of the sexual act, its mere use for enjoyment, which is responsible for the stigma it carries — a stigma dating at least as far back as Sodom and Gomorra. The Hindus have always regulated in a wise manner the sexual relations between husband and wife, advocating a continence unacceptable in the West. The well-known authority on the Tantras, Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon) writes:

"...Brahmacharya, or continency, is not as is sometimes supposed, a requisite of the student *ashrama* only, but is a rule which governs the married householder (*grihasta*) also. According to Vaidika injunctions, union of man and wife must take place once a month on the fifth day after the cessation of the menses, and then only..." (#6, p. 115)

The above must suffice to show how Alan W. Watts has misled his readers and his audience with nearly everything he has stated with respect to "Eastern Philosophy" in general, and how he is obsessed by an irrational and unnatural "naturalness," a formula which he applies to all and everything.

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Berkeley, Calif.

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Editor's Note: [i.e., Victor Endersby]

Mr. Roos has not missed much, but there are a few points that we will add in a future article.

A thing that amazes us is this: although no student of Oriental literature in Mr. Roos' sense, we have read enough to be confronted with the enormous masses of writing, little of it quoted by Mr. Roos, inculcating: (a) the intense effort necessary to attain real spiritual liberation, (b) the necessity of the complete abnegation of sex in pursuit of the same object. These themes occur so often that one gets tired of them. How does it happen that Mr. Watts bases his whole case on a tiny section of that teaching going in the opposite direction? Did he work through this mass — and there is so much of it that a man will be old and gray

before he could adequately study all of it — casting all else aside until he uncovered this golden nugget of attainment by doing nothing — except as to sex, and doing that to extremes. It hardly seems likely.

It would also cast reflections on Mr. Watts' personal tastes that we would hardly like to make.

The extreme asceticism inculcated by the real Oriental Teachings is likely to frighten Westerns, who know that they cannot live up to it. But it was never intended to apply to the "normal" man. If one lives as cleanly and unselfishly as he can, looking forward to the day when matter will be outgrown, not trying to make the leap all at once, but moving ahead a little every day, he will be climbing the same mountain by a longer path; and the time of crucial struggle which all will meet in some life, will find him better prepared than some mad effort at prematurely becoming a yogi-ascetic. Such efforts are more likely to lead him to tantra of one kind or another in later lives, by reaction, than to liberation.

It seems more likely that he found a "guru" who revealed this interesting "inwardness" of the Orient for his benefit. And that Mr. Watts, whose upbringing and former professional career were puritanical, being in a state of reaction therefrom, found the novelty and "unconventionality" of the doctrines a "natural." They certainly are a "natural" for intriguing a radio audience.

[— Victor Endersby]

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THE WATER DRAGON

In Japanese mythology the Dragon is to water as the
Mother is to earth

A dragon was pulling a bear into its terrible mouth.

A courageous man went and rescued the bear.

There are such helpers in the world, who rush to save anyone who cries out. Like Mercy itself, they run toward the screaming.

And they can't be bought off.

If you were to ask one of those, "Why did you come so quickly?"

He or she would say, "Because I heard your helplessness." . . .

Crying out loud and weeping are great resources.

A nursing mother, all she does is wait to hear her child.

Just a little beginning-whimper, and she's there.

God created the child, that is, your wanting,

so that it might cry out, so that milk might come.

Cry out! Don't be stolid and silent

with your pain. Lament!

And let the milk of Loving flow into you.

■ Jelaluddin Rumi

■ in *Mathnawi II*

translated by Coleman Barks