
Is Theosophy Authentic?

von Franklin Merrell-Wolff

Part 1

Is Theosophy authentic? This question has arisen many times since the founding of the movement, and many answers have been given. Yet the question has arisen again by individuals who are genuinely oriented to the Enlightened Consciousness, who therefore must be viewed as entirely sincere. As a consequence the writer has felt himself called upon to face once more this query, which had been one in his own mind in earlier years. In the present instance the questioning has come from individuals who are sincerely oriented to the Buddhist Dharma and thus presents a different and, on the whole, a higher form of doubt than that expressed by those with a Western scientific or orthodox Christian orientation. Accordingly, here the problem will be approached with a primary reference to the relationship between Theosophy and the traditional Buddhist teaching as it exists available for an uninitiated student.

First, in order to clear the field, it will be desirable to determine in what sense "Theosophy" is to be understood. This is necessary since the word is old and can be traced at least to the time of Plotinus, and is not always employed in the same sense. The word has been used from time to time by various societies belonging to the Christian milieu, once at least as early as the seventeenth century. Vaughan has identified "Theosophy" with philosophic mysticism, thus placing it in contrast with the non-rationalistic forms of mysticism.

If, then, Theosophy is not identical with Buddhism, Vedanta, or any other openly known philosophy or religion, what is it? The source works are definite on this point. Considering Theosophy in the sense of a doctrine or teaching, rather than in the other sense of "way of life," it is said to be a partial statement emanating from pure Bodha or the Eternal Wisdom of which every authentic religious movement or philosophy is, in its origin, a partial statement. Bodha, in its essence and purity, is beyond name, form, and symbol, and is eternal; but, in variable degree and in less pure form, it is revealed in name, form, and symbol. The degree in which it can be revealed to the individual consciousness depends upon the purity and evolutionary development of the latter. Consequently, the higher aspect of the Revealed Bodha is unavoidably esoteric for most men. The open religions and philosophies are in the nature of stepped-down or exoteric statements, not for arbitrary reasons, but from the necessities imposed by the limitations of the understanding of most human beings.

The esoteric Bodha has existed in this world as long as man has existed. From time to time exoteric presentations have appeared throughout the whole history of mankind, but all such presentations have been only partial and, apparently, have always been subject to corruption and decay. From this source came Buddhism, the Vedanta, and all the other great religious and philosophical movements ever known among men. Theosophy, in its primary meaning, is identical with both the utterly pure Root-Bodhi and its esoteric manifestation, while, in the more objective

sense, as a movement starting in 1875, it is another opening of the door of presentation. Such is the statement one finds in the source material.

The question as to whether Theosophy is what it claims to be does not concern us at this point. For the present we are interested only in its self-definition and its consequent relation to extant religions and philosophies, particularly historic Buddhism. As self-defined it is identical with the Root of all these religions and philosophies and, in especially marked degree, with the Root of Buddhism and Vedanta. Thus, in the FUNDAMENTAL sense, it claims to be identical with both Buddhism and Vedanta.

It may well that a scholarly study of the source literature of Theosophy would find a predominance of the Buddhist approach and language. If so, this is quite understandable, since the two intelligences most responsible for Theosophical literature are self-confessed Buddhists in their personal consciousness and background. Nonetheless, they do not affirm Truth as being the exclusive monopoly of historic Buddhism. It is also possible that there does exist some Buddhist sect in which the formulated Dharma exists in a greater state of purity than elsewhere. In any case, Theosophy is not identical with the whole of exoteric Buddhism, nor with any other Oriental philosophy or religion. It ties in with occidental currents as well.

Part II

The present challenge of the authenticity of Theosophy comes from persons who assume, or apparently assume, the primacy, at least within the limits of objectively known history, of the One who was known as Gautama Buddha. Theosophical literature gives abundant evidence that its authors gave the same valuation to the entity who was known as Gautama in one of his incarnations. The present writer testifies to his sharing in the same view, so we start with agreement at quite an important point. But, inasmuch as there are clearly discrepancies between the extant and accessible formulated Buddhist Dharma and the teachings of Theosophy, the question naturally arises as to which is authentic. The challenge to Theosophy lists a number of items, which are given below.

- (a) Fundamental in the teachings of traditional Buddhism is the doctrine of anatman, the denial of a persistent self or soul. Since this doctrine is found very widely spread throughout the great divisions and sects of Buddhism, despite their divergence, and even incompatibility, on many other points, the conclusion seems ineluctable that this was a primary teaching of Gautama Buddha. In contrast, Theosophy seems to assert the reality of the Atman in certain senses while agreeing with the anatmic doctrine in other respects. An incompatibility is suggested that seems to force a choice.
- (b) Buddhist teaching is nastikata or nontheistic, viewing the ultimate as an impersonal "Suchness," to take a term from the Shunyata (Voidness) form of the Mahayana. On this point Theosophy is in agreement in affirming the ultimate Root to be an "Eternal, Boundless, Omnipresent and Immutable PRINCIPLE, on which all speculation is impossible, since it transcends the power of human conception and can only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude." But Theosophy does affirm the existence of a number of more-than-human intelligences, some trans-nirvanic, that may be, and at times have often been, called "gods." The correspondent suggests a discrepancy here.

- (c) Theosophy teaches, or seems to teach, the ultimate reality of *Svabhava*, or *Svabhavat*, as the one real element from which both spirit and matter are derived, whereas Buddhism teaches *Svabhavashunyata*, or that all things are empty. Thus Theosophy appears to give a substantive value to the Ultimate while Buddhism is radically non-substantive or positivistic in the noumenal as well as in the phenomenal sense.
- (d) Theosophy teaches the existence of an esoteric doctrine requiring initiation for realization of it, while it is said that Buddha had no esoteric doctrine and repudiated the idea.
- (e) Points are raised below the philosophic level challenging the motives and integrity of H. P. Blavatsky and the authors of *The Mahatma Letters*. They involve the following contentions:
1. The phenomena reported to have been produced seem too much like card tricks and stage-magic to be authentic, with added doubt cast by the Coulomb affair and the SPR report in connection therewith.
 2. No new Buddhist material translated and given to the public.
 3. A particular translation given in *The Mahatma Letters* was only a paraphrase of Beal's *Catena of Buddhist Scriptures*.
 4. *The Mahatma Letters* are too argumentative and gossipy, and the philosophy is limited and has been better stated in other exoteric sources.
 5. "Theosophy" uses *nirmanakaya* to mean a bodhisattva who is not physical but is working on the astral plane. The Buddhist *nirmanakaya* INCLUDES those living on the physical.
 6. Theosophy, though claiming to be an esoteric doctrine, does not rise to an elementary understanding of the publicly taught doctrines of Buddhism.
 7. Hindu and Buddhist terms are mangled and jumbled up together without distinction.
 8. Theosophy emphasizes saving the world in the face of a crisis, while Buddhism vows salvation as a perpetual problem.
 9. Theosophy is activist while Buddhism, along with Hinduism, is contemplative

Other minor points are raised, but not of enough importance for consideration here.

The specific implication of the above queries is given explicitly in the question: Was H. P. Blavatsky a phony? Before undertaking the detailed consideration of the above points, the writer will briefly consider this last question.

PART III

Was H. P. Blavatsky a phony? The charge of conscious fraud is serious, yet, in view of the very great intelligence evident in the production of *The Secret Doctrine*, and its all but superhuman scholarship, the hypothesis that it was a massive but honest self-deception seems well nigh unthinkable. It would seem that we must either view the whole Theosophical conception as a fraud or else that it is just what it claims to be. Several considerations could be raised that

discredit the hypothesis of fraud, but the writer will here consider but two, which in his mind are practically conclusive.

- (a) There must be an adequate motive for the perpetuation of a conscious fraud. The labor involved in one work alone, i.e., *The Secret Doctrine*, is so vast that it seems unthinkable that a person of such ability could not have perpetrated a fraud that would have given her some tangible worldly advantage. Actually, all she got out of it in a material sense was work in poverty while enduring the pain of a body that was far from well and, withal, subjected to much adverse criticism and calumny. A motivation of lofty compassion seems the only one adequate to explain the willingness to put forth the Herculean effort in the face of so much pain. This seems enough to cover the point.
- (b) Some years ago the writer, in preparation for a lecture, made a comparison of the state of Western science as it was at the time of the publication of *The Secret Doctrine* and as it was at the time of the lecture, twentieth century physics having been well developed at that time. The special points noted were those in which *The Secret Doctrine* took exception to scientific conceptions and suggested a counter point of view based upon the occult teachings. The writer had little difficulty in finding twenty-four or twenty-five points in which the change in scientific views was definitely toward agreement with the occult teachings as given in the Theosophical literature. Some of the shifts were very important, whereas others were minor. The instances are noted below.

In the tenth letter or the second edition of *The Mahatma Letters* there is to be found the following statement: "Rejecting with contempt the theistic theory we reject as much the automaton theory, teaching that states of consciousness are produced by the marshalling of the molecules of the brain; and we feel as little respect for that other hypothesis - the production of molecular motion by consciousness. Then what do we believe in? We believe in the much laughed at 'phlogiston' (See article, "What is force and what is matter?" (*The Theosophist*, September, 1882.)), and in what some natural philosophers would call *nisus*, the incessant though perfectly imperceptible (to the ordinary senses) motion or efforts one body is making on another - the pulsations of inert matter - its life. The bodies of the Planetary spirits are formed of that which Priestly and others called *Phlogiston* and for which we have another name - this essence in its highest seventh state forming that matter of which the organisms of the highest and purest Dhyanas are composed, and in its lowest or densest form (so impalpable yet that science calls it energy and force) serving as a cover to the Planetaries of the first or lowest degree."

If we turn to the article in *The Theosophist*, September, 1882, we find the following significant statement. "Neither an atom of silicon, nor an atom of oxygen, is capable of any further subdivision, into something else - they (the scientists) say. But the only good reason we can find for such a strange belief is that they have tried the experiment and failed. But how can they tell that a new discovery, some new invention of still finer and more perfect apparatuses and instruments may not show their error some day? How do they know that those very bodies now called 'elementary atoms' are not in their turn compound bodies or molecules, which, when analyzed with still greater minuteness, may show containing in themselves the real, primordial, elementary globules, the gross encasement of the still finer atom-spark - the spark of LIFE, the source of electricity - MATTER still!"

The phlogiston theory is one suggested by Stahl and advanced by Priestly in the seventeenth century. The *phlogiston* was conceived as “the matter of fire in composition with other bodies.” Ordinary burning, such as flame, was conceived as a release of this phlogiston. Subsequently, the theory was abandoned and replaced by the familiar conception that fire is an effect of oxidation and thus is not itself a kind of matter. In its original form the notion of phlogiston is outmoded in science, but it is not hard to see that the essence of this conception has returned in a subtler form in twentieth century physics.

Dampier Whetham (*A History of Science*) gives 1897 as the date at which the modern revolution in physics begins, fifteen years subsequent to the letter and article above quoted. Today we definitely view the atom as compounded and subject to disintegration both in nature and under conditions controlled by the scientist. Chemical elements have been transformed into other chemical elements, and even some elements synthesized that have not been found in nature. The atom bomb has publicized this fact to all of the world. In the explosion of the atom bomb there is a development of very intense heat and light and extensive radiation. Now, to be sure, this phenomenon is not fire in the ordinary sense of oxidation, yet it is very reasonable to view it as a kind of fire. May we not view the radiation as a “matter of fire in composition with other bodies?” Today science does view radiation as essentially a state of matter holding the property of “mass” in common with ordinary matter. Have we not at last found the real phlogiston?

Today the idea that matter and electricity are of one sameness is virtually a commonplace, and the idea that electricity and life are essentially the same is not strange. The point in this discussion probably has become clear. A view of matter advanced in Theosophical literature as early as 1882 has, in the period from 1897 to the present, become so dramatically established that the whole field of human life, political and otherwise, has been profoundly shaken. It would be a remarkable “phony” that could call a turn like that.

Another striking instance or rapprochement between the teachings of Theosophy and of Western science, during the period subsequent to the publication of *The Secret Doctrine*, is found in the change in the estimation of the age of the earth. Dempier-Whetham reports that Lord Kelvin estimated the age of the earth in 1882 as less than 200 million years, since it was in a molten state, and in 1899 shortened the period to between 20 and 40 million years. None of the astronomers and physicists gave figures sufficiently large to satisfy the needs of the geologists and biologists. In *The Secret Doctrine* (3rd ed., Vol. II, 71–73.) figures are given from the Tamil calendar, called *Tirukkananda Panchanga*, for the age of the earth that are said to agree approximately with the figures of the Esoteric Philosophy. The figure for the evolution of the solar system up to 1887 is 1,955,884,687 years. As is well known, *The Secret Doctrine* statement of the total period of earth-evolution is 4,520,000,000 years and the present is roughly at the halfway point. Hence, the round figure in either case is on the order of two billion years. In his book *The Mysterious Universe* the late Sir James Jeans, a top-shelf astronomer and physicist, gives the age of the earth as also on the order of two billion years, a result reached by two lines of evidence and calculation, one of which is particularly interesting. It appears that the age of a piece of uranium ore can be calculated by weighing the relative amount of uranium to lead in the ore, since the rate of decay of uranium to lead is known. The above figure is derived from uranium taken from the oldest known rocks.

Since today’s science is convinced, with good reason, that the source of solar energy is not shrinkage or solar combustion, in the ordinary sense, but radiation released from intra-atomic

levels, the sheer mass of the sun is sufficient to supply radiation for much more than two billion years, so no difficulty arises because of the time indicated by the decay of uranium. Thus, in the light of present knowledge, the figures appear to be sound and, at the same time, are reached quite independently of either the Indian or esoteric figures.

The foregoing are two samples of correlations that the writer allows may be extended to several more instances. (Indeed, an exhaustive study along this line might prove very profitable.) However, we shall forego the examination of other instances here, as this seems enough documentation of the argument at the present time.

If, now, in twenty-five or more instances it can be shown that late science has developed in the direction of agreement with the teachings of Theosophy, when compared with the views of science in 1889, what is the probability that the Theosophical movement was a fraud or hoax? It is not hard to realize that the theory of probability would give us a very small fraction, particularly as some of the conceptions are quite complex. On this line of evidence alone it appears to the writer that the conclusion that those responsible for the basic Theosophical teachings had “something” is ineluctable. Also, that something must be pretty big.

It is not suggested that the basic Theosophical teachings are to be viewed as beyond serious criticism, but any adverse criticism aimed at overthrow of the system as a whole would have to be a major and profound piece of work if it is to deserve serious consideration. The typical attacks that are based mainly, if not wholly, on the *argumentum ad hominem* are contemptible and should be received with scorn.

Part IV

It is hoped by the writer that what has been said so far will serve to lift the present argument well above the level of mud-slinging and the impugning of the motives or the ability or those responsible for the Theosophical Movement and its basic literature. The question of the relation between Theosophy and traditional Buddhism, or the Vedanta, for that matter, is a high level question. It should be treated with seriousness and dignity, as between these three systems there are certain obvious and unquestioned agreements. But there are also differences of sufficient importance to force upon the student the responsibility or decision as to which is the most profound and truer. As the writer understands the attitudes of the proponents of these systems they all grant the seeker the right of free and honest decision, but urge *serious* and unbiased study. We propose to approach the subject in that spirit.

- (a) The first query, the one relative to the *anatmic* doctrine, is probably the most important of all. This doctrine is so basic throughout Buddhism, with all its multitudes of divisions, that it may well be viewed as the most crucial doctrinal principle of that system. In contrast, Theosophical teaching on its surface does not appear to stand in agreement. Thus it might appear that the two systems must fundamentally diverge. This is a question that we must examine with some care.

According to the accounts of the life of Gautama Buddha, as they have come down to us, the Great One, early in His search for the Truth that might resolve the problem of suffering, sought wisdom at the feet of certain Brahmin Pandits. They taught him karma, reincarnation and the doctrine of a persisting *Atman*, which is variously translated as “Self” or “soul.” Gautama, after

penetrating into these teachings, confirmed the soundness of the first two but denied that the conception of a persistent self or soul was valid. It appears that in his subsequent discourses no point was more emphasized than this. It also appears that the Indian world as a whole did not find this teaching acceptable, and it has posed a difficult problem for Western man as it was quite contrary to centuries-old Christian teachings. In the various divisions and elaborations of Buddhism that have developed since the time of Gautama, this teaching apparently persists throughout, although with variations, some apparently more sweeping than the original doctrine and some, also presumptively, less sweeping. As a matter of fact, the exoteric scholar can never be perfectly certain as to the exact content of Buddha's teachings, since He seems to have never written anything, and subsequent divergences in the doctrines are plainly evident. We must infer a good deal. But there can be no reasonable doubt that *anatman* in some sense was taught and that it was fundamental to the formulated Dharma.

The central core of Buddhist psychology, which appears as most ancient and probably was taught by Shakyamuni himself, and is generally accepted by the various sects, may be stated quite simply in a few words. Quoting from McGovern (*An Introduction to Mahayana Buddhism*, 153), the teaching is outlined as follows:

There is no *Atman* (permanent self or soul) for the personality consists of five skandhas or aggregates, or faculties, *viz.*

1. *rupa* - body or form, in other words, the physical body;
2. *vedana* - sensation or perception;
3. *samjna* - conception or ratiocination;
4. *samskara* - mental qualities such as love, hate, etc.;
5. *vijnana* - consciousness, more especially in this connection, self-consciousness.

None of these can claim preeminence. One is not the basis around which the others are grouped. They are all coordinate parts, constantly changing, so that at no two moments can the personality claim to be identical, yet at the same time there is a constant Karmic persistence.

The picture one may receive from this is of an *organism* of distinguishable but self-existent parts that are always in a state or condition of constant change or becoming or never-ceasing interweaving, with Karmic Law serving as the only binding unity. Disregarding the specific form of the classification, the basic idea is not unknown in the history of Western thought. One is reminded of the universal flux of Heraclitus and the quite modern psycho-physical concept of organism as body-mind rather than body and mind. We also find something quite similar in the Theory of Relativity of modern mathematical physics wherein even space and time are no longer absolutes and there is no permanent atom.

However, though the conception of the *Atman*, in the sense of a permanent and substantial self or soul, is denied, there is not a complete absence of all permanency. All stands interconnected and unified by Law or Karma (the analogue of the mathematical but non-substantial invariants of modern Relativity). Thus there is a thread of continuity or unity between youth and age and between the various entities of a series of incarnations. There is that which does persist through

all changes, including those of birth and death, and so a meaning does attach to the conception of an effort to attain Emancipation or Enlightenment that extends over more than one incarnation.

In the preface to his *The Gospel of Buddha*, Paul Carus makes his point that the notion of “self” or “soul” should have been and could be defined in a way that would have been quite acceptable to Buddha. The objection was aimed at the conception of the “self” as a permanent substance, an idea that was widely current at His time. Thus if the “I AM” identification is with the continuum of the LAW, then the conception of a permanent *Atman*, or “I,” would be acceptable with primary Buddhism. It is the notion of substantiveness, which is really the focus of objection borne out by the frequent references in many sutras to “ego-substance” and “self-substance.” Furthermore, this ego-self-substance is denied not only of all periods and sentient beings, but likewise of all things. This is a usage that the writer for a long time found difficult, since it seemed quite unreal to attach the notion of “Self” to anything so objective as “substance” or “thing.” Likewise, the notion of “*Atma*” in Shankara’s “*Atmavidya*” does not *at all* suggest the objectivity that normally belongs to the notion of “substance.”

There is another point to note before turning to consideration of Theosophical psychology. In *The Gospel of Buddha*, we find the following statement given as part of a discourse by the Buddha: “That which men call the ego when they say ‘I am’ is not an entity behind the skandhas; it originates by the cooperation of the skandhas.” If we may assume that this quotation is a valid representation of the original teaching, then it throws a considerable light upon the meaning of the *anatmic* doctrine as it was meant by Buddha Himself. The “I am” in this sense seems to be none other than personal egoism, which carries the force of “I am I and none other,” and, therefore, is separative and the base of selfishness.¹ Furthermore, it is viewed not as the core that supports the aggregates as attributes, but as a sort epiphenomenal effect growing out of the interaction of the aggregates. As compared with the aggregates, the personal ego is a *maya* or a mirage that, while the belief in it produces practical effects, yet has only a transitory or unreal existence that vanishes completely after the final death of the incarnation. With new birth its successor appears, but, although karmically related, it is not the same ego. If this is true to the real meaning of the Buddha’s teaching, as we shall see later, there is no discrepancy between the *anatma* doctrine of Buddha and Theosophical psychology.

The psychology of Theosophy is basically similar to that of Buddhism in that it conceives of man as an aggregate, though the term “principles” is most commonly employed. But the classification differs from the aggregates as given both in the sense of a variation in the definition of component parts and in that the number is seven instead of five. However, the different Buddhist schools do not always use the five-fold system and, according to McGovern, the Yogachara school of the Mahayana branch has an eight-fold system. Similarly, the Theosophical system has not had a constant form even during the lifetime of the founder of the Movement. Though the main classification remained septenary, there are three principal listings of the component principles involving certain changes, these changes being explained as progressive approximations to the truth necessitated by pedagogical consideration. Also there is a four-fold classification given in

¹ In Western philosophy the term *egoism* refers to the ethical theory that one *ought* to advance one’s own self-interest exclusively. Wolff’s use of the term here is psychological - one’s orientation to, and identification with, the unique cluster of psychical contents that individuate one person from another, which leads to selfishness. In Sanskrit this function is called *ahamkara* (the I-maker). - RL

The Key to Theosophy, which, however, involves no contradiction. The following classification seems to present the picture with reasonable accuracy.

1. ATMA, or HIGHER SELF - the inseparable ray of the universal or ONE SELF, which can never be 'objective' under any circumstances, even to the highest spiritual perception, and is really the ABSOLUTE and indistinguishable from IT.
2. BUDDHI, or SPIRITUAL SOUL, the vehicle of *Atma*, passive with most men, but when united with Manas, or the Mind-principle, as in him who is Enlightened, becomes the spiritual or divine EGO.
3. MANAS, or MIND-PRINCIPLE - the basis of the relatively permanent Inner or Higher Ego or individuality, which persists from incarnation to incarnation.
4. LOWER MANAS - the personal or animal mind, which, in connection with the three lower principles, forms the lower, or personal, ego.
5. KAMA RUPA - literally, the form or body of desires, which is not a body during life but becomes such for a season after death in Kama Loka.
6. PRANA, or the LIFE PRINCIPLE - in its more objective aspect, which sustains embodied existence.
7. LINGA SHARIRA, sometimes called ASTRAL BODY and sometimes ETHERIC BODY - is really the Paradigm upon which the physical body or objective appearance is draped, as it were.

The earlier classifications listed the physical body but later it was explained that this is properly an effect of the conjunction of the Principles rather than being a Principle in its own right. In the final and less well known classification, the *Atman* is replaced by another principle, it being explained that *Atma* is no true Principle, but rather the all-embracing ABSOLUTE. Thus *Atma* in the Theosophical system may be viewed as having the same meaning as the ALAYA VIJNANA in the Yogachara system, as given by McGovern.

Theosophy is definite and insistent in its teaching that the lower self or personal ego is essentially unreal and evanescent, lasting only during one lifetime and during a limited after death period of rewards or penalties. The personal ego associated with the subsequent incarnation is a new ego, but is the Karmic effect of its ancestor.

It would seem that, so far as the personal ego is concerned, the teaching of Theosophy is in fundamental agreement with the Buddhist teaching as thus far considered. If this is the sense in which Gautama Buddha employed the notion of *Atma* in asserting the *anatma* doctrine, there is no disagreement between the original Buddhism and the Theosophical teaching on this point. There are references that support the view that this was the case.

The following quotation is taken from *The Secret Doctrine*, 3rd ed., Vol. III, 395.

Said the All-Merciful: Blessed are ye, O Bhikshus, happy are ye who have understood the mystery of Being and *Non-Being* explained in the Dharma, and have given preference to

the latter, for ye are verily my Arhats. . . . The elephant, who sees his form mirrored in the lake, looks at it, and then goes away, taking it for the real body of another elephant, is far wiser than the man who beholds his face in the stream and, looking at it, says, "Here am I . . . I am I" - for the "I," his Self, is not in the world of the twelve Nidanas and mutability, but in that of Non-Being, the only world beyond the snares of Maya. . . . That alone, which has neither cause nor author, which is self-existing, eternal, far beyond the reach of mutability, is the true "I," the Self of the Universe.

Here quite clearly the "I," or "Self," is denied, and in another, transcendent, sense is affirmed. This position is consistent with the Theosophical teachings.

The following is from the *Abhidhama Kosha Vyakha*: "Mendicants: Remember that there is within man *no abiding principle* whatever, and that only the learned disciple who acquires wisdom in saying 'I am' knows what he is saying."

Here the point is that there is a valid I-reference, but it is not a principle *within* man. Both the *Atman* of Theosophy and the ALAYA VIJNANA of Buddhism are not principles within man. Nor indeed are they without, being neither within nor without. Again, consider the incident where the Buddha refused to answer the question of the monk Vacchagotta when he wished to know whether there was or was not an ego in man. According to the *Samyuttaka Kikaya*, when subsequently Ananda asked of the Blessed One why he maintained silence, the latter said:

If I, Ananda, when the wandering monk Vacchagotta asked me, "Is there the Ego?" had answered, "The Ego is," then that, Ananda, would have confirmed the doctrine of the Samantas and the Brahmanas, who believe in permanence. If I, Ananda, when the wandering monk Vacchagotta asked, "Is there not the Ego?" had answered, "The Ego is not," then that, Ananda, would have confirmed the doctrine of those who believe in annihilation.

This carries the implication that the Buddha's teaching was that "the Ego neither is nor is not," or, equally, "the Ego both is and is not." As is always the case with paradoxes, the reconciliation consists in taking the terms in two senses. In this case it could mean, and probably does mean, denial of the personal ego, while affirming the Higher Self.

In this quotation the implication of an esoteric teaching is very clear. Not everything was taught to everybody, but only as the understanding was prepared to receive. This is the essential meaning of an Esoteric Doctrine.

It is perfectly true that one can take quotations from other sutras that at least seem like a radical denial of all selfhood or egohood up to the loftiest conception of a Universal Self or *Atman*. It is also possible to find quotations that suggest that Buddhism is a nihilistic materialism, as such - for example, the following, quoted by Rhys Davids from the *Brahmaja Sutra*:

Upon what principle, or on what ground, do these mendicants and Brahmins hold the doctrine of future existence? They teach that the soul is material or immaterial, or is both or neither; that it will have one or many modes of consciousness; that its perceptions will be few or boundless; that it will be in a state of joy or misery, or neither. These are the sixteen heresies, teaching a conscious existence after death. Then there are eight heresies teaching that the soul, material or immaterial, or both or neither, finite or infinite or both

or neither, has one unconscious existence after death. And, finally, eight others that teach that the soul, in the same eight ways, exists after death in a state of being neither conscious nor unconscious. Mendicants, that which binds the teacher to existence (*viz.*, *tanha*, or thirst), is cut off, but his body still remains. While his body shall remain, he will be seen by gods and men, but after the termination of life, upon the dissolution of the body, neither gods nor men shall see him.

Rhys Davids goes on to remark, "Would it be possible in a more complete and categorical manner to deny that there is any soul - anything of any kind which continues to exist in any manner after death?"

Mr. Rhys Davids, who in his time was the ranking Western Buddhist scholar, states categorically that "Nirvana" means complete extinction and that Buddhism is materialistic. Also, Spengler asserts that it is materialistic. Quotations can be found that seem to justify these views. What is the truth? Clearly not all the sutras, both Northern and Southern, can be viewed as the authentic teachings of Gautama Buddha, and while it is unquestionable true that there is much in Buddhist literature that is valuable and sound, which was spoken and written by others that Gautama Himself, yet it is His teachings that most properly define what real Buddhism is. How are we to know what this is? It would appear that if there is no esoteric authority, such as a hidden and preserved record, to resolve this question, then we run the danger that mere individual taste, favorable or malicious, will answer the question in innumerable and incompatible ways. Theosophy claims to speak from such authority and builds a strong supporting case.

The Theosophical psychology has more elaborate ramifications than appear to have been the case with the earlier exoteric Buddhism taught by the Buddha. The four lower principles may be viewed as substantially an aggregate in the Buddhist sense with respect to which the personal ego is no more than an epiphenomenal effect, lasting through the life-cycle and a limited subjective period after death, but no longer. But Theosophy posits a Higher Ego, identical with a higher phase of Mind, which persists from incarnation to incarnation, and which is identified with individuality, conceived as distinct from the objective personality. It is not hard to find Buddhist statements which also affirm the continuance of individuality from incarnation to incarnation. Take for example the following from *A Buddhist Catechism*, by Subhadra Bhikshu.

Buddhism teaches the reign of perfect goodness and wisdom without a *personal* GOD, *continuance of individuality without an immortal soul*, eternal happiness without a local heaven, the way of salvation without a vicarious Savior, redemption worked out by each one himself without any prayers, sacrifices, and penances, without the ministry of ordained priests, without the intercession of saints, without Divine mercy. Finally, it teaches that supreme perfection is attainable in this life and on this earth.

It is thus quite apparent that at least some forms of Buddhism stand in agreement with the Theosophical teaching of a persisting individuality. There may be a difference due to the naming of this individuality, "Higher Ego," but one may well doubt that this point is fundamental. For Theosophy does not teach that the Higher Ego is permanent in more than a relative sense. In fact, Theosophy distinguishes between "egoism" and "egoity," the former applying to the personal ego and identical with "selfishness" while the latter is identical with "individuality." It would be Theosophically correct to say that Gautama Buddha had no egoism but had egoity, for He had a recognizable character. The word "ego" corresponds to the sense "I am I," which, in the lower

sense takes the form “I am I and none other,” while in the higher sense of egoity means “I am I and also others.”

It is Theosophically correct to say that all egoity is achieved and, in addition, what is also taught by Buddhism, that everything that becomes is impermanent. There is a difference of relative persistence in the different kinds of egos, just as a granite outcropping has a greater persistence than a mushroom, but in time all is resolved back into the Primordial and Indeterminate Permanency.

Theosophy teaches that the two-fold egoity is a general characteristic of mankind, though there are some exceptions, both of a supernal and infernal sort. It is also taught that there is a rare third form of egoity. This is the Divine or Spiritual Ego, the conscious union of Buddhi and Manas, and it would seem to constitute the Egoity of the Buddhas or Christs, though the literature gives but little more than hints on this subject. The Spiritual ego is definitely viewed as an attainment, so far realized by very few units among mankind. The writer would suggest, on his own authority here, that this egoity may be achieved only by He who, having reached Nirvana, makes the Great Renunciation.

The Theosophical literature gives very scanty material upon the subject of the Spiritual Ego and the references are often ambiguous. The clearest statement is to be found in *The Key to Theosophy*, but elsewhere one gets the impression that it is the same as the Higher Ego (as in the *Theosophical Glossary*), and also as being the same as the “Higher Self,” as in the case or certain references in *The Secret Doctrine*. But in *The Key to Theosophy*, this ambiguity is acknowledged and the statement there is intended to clarify the subject. In the latter case the Spiritual Ego is not identified with the Higher Self. Here the Higher Self is identified with the Universal *Atman* in the sense of the ABSOLUTE, and involves no element of individuality or becoming. The Higher Self may be identified with the ultimate reference of “I” but it definitely is not “I am I” in any sense, however lofty or inclusive.

Definitely, it is taught in Theosophy that Spiritual Egoity is achieved. It is not an entirely existing endowment of all men, whereas the Higher Self is a universal fact, the same in the beginning as at the end. It thus follows that even Spiritual Egoity is not absolutely eternal or permanent. Thus there is no contradiction here with the general thesis of Buddhism that all egoity is temporary and, therefore, is in the most ultimate sense unreal when Reality is identical with ultimate permanence. However, the teaching is more elaborate than that which seems to have been a part of the original exoteric teachings of the Buddha. But this does not necessarily imply any contradiction between the two teachings if it is granted, as Theosophy affirms, that Buddha had an esoteric doctrine as well as an exoteric teaching designed to meet the limited understanding of the masses.

To conclude this part of the discussion, in summary we may say that it *appears*, from the records available, that the original *anatman* doctrine taught by Gautama Buddha applied to the notion of a permanent personal ego conceived as a differentiated core supporting the aggregates as attributes. Buddha denied that there was any such core and affirmed for the personal ego only an ephemeral epiphenomenal existence as an effect of the interaction of the aggregates. Theosophy stands in essential, and perhaps complete, agreement with this view, but posits two higher forms of egoity, which are relatively more permanent, but not absolutely permanent, and does not apply the notion of *Atman* to egoity in any sense. Thus there is some discrepancy in the use of words, but not

therefore a difference of meaning. There are sutras, more especially belonging to part of the Northern canon, that rather strongly suggest, with respect to the doctrine of *anatman*, a contradiction between Theosophy and the forms of Buddhism oriented to those sutras. Thus before one could say that there is a definite disagreement between Buddhism and Theosophy on this point, one would have to decide which form of Buddhism is authentic. Upon this question a completely objective decision, without any reference to esoteric knowledge, appears extremely difficult, if not impossible, and it appears that there is real danger that wishfulness or prejudice may become determinant in one's choice, in the absence of esoteric insight, with the result that one's conclusion may be mainly significant as a subjective psychological confession.

Part V

(b) The question as to whether Theosophy and Buddhism agree or diverge in their attitudes on theism is very easily answered. They both teach a nontheistic doctrine. That this is true of Buddhism is well known; that it is also true of Theosophy can be confirmed by several references, but for a clear statement on this point we shall simply quote from the tenth letter of *The Mahatma Letters*:

Neither our philosophy nor ourselves believe in God, least of all in one whose pronoun necessitates a capital H. . . . We deny God both as philosophers and as Buddhists. We know there are planetary and other spiritual lives, and we know there is in our system no such thing as God, either personal or impersonal. Parabrahm is not a God, but absolute immutable law, and Iswara is the effect of Avidya and Maya, Ignorance based upon the great illusion.

Such are the words of one of the two *men* who were most responsible for the Theosophical Movement and its teachings, though acting behind the scenes. Repeated confirmation of this view is to be found throughout the literature. There are statements in which the terms "God" and "gods" appear but they are definitely not to be taken in the theistic sense.

However, Theosophy does teach that there are developed beings, so far transcending man that the ignorant may very well think of them as gods. Yet such are ex-men, and belong to a higher and humanly inconceivable order of evolution. They are said to have much to do with the government of worlds and lokas. In *The Secret Doctrine* and *The Mahatma Letters* they are commonly called "Dhyān Chohans," though other names are also given. A hierarchy of intelligences is definitely affirmed. But this in itself does not imply a divergence from the teaching found in some Buddhist sutras.

So far as the writer knows, the term "Dhyān Chohan" does not exist in the available translations of exoteric Buddhist sutras, but there are other terms that may be equivalent. *The Mahatma Letters* confirms this in the three following quotations.

In letter No. XVI (100) we find the following:

The Deva-Chan, or land of "Sukhavati," is *allegorically* described by our Lord Buddha himself. What he said may be found in the Shan-Mun-yi-Tung. Says Tathagata: "Many thousand myriads of Systems of worlds beyond this (ours) there is a region of Bliss called *Sukhavati* - This region is encircled with *seven* rows of railings, *seven* rows of vast curtains, *seven* rows of waving trees; this holy abode of Arhats is governed by the Tathagatas (Dhyān Chohans) and is possessed by the Bodhisatvas. It hath *seven* precious

lakes, in the midst of which flow crystalline waters having “*seven and one*” properties, or distinctive qualities (the seven principles emanating from the ONE). This, O Sariputra is the “*Deva-Chan.*” It is divine Udambara flower casts a root *in the shadow of every earth*, and blossoms for all those who reach it. Those born in the blessed region are truly felicitous, there are no more griefs or sorrows *in that cycle* for them. . . . Myriads of Spirits resort there for rest and then *return to their own regions*. Again, O Sariputra, in that land of joy many who are born in it are *Avaivartyas*.

Again, from the same letter (102): “Everything is so harmoniously adjusted in nature - especially in the subjective world, that no mistake can ever be committed by the Tathagatas - Dhyan Chohans - who guide the impulses.”

Finally, also in the same letter (108): “Every such ‘world’ within the Sphere of Effects has a Tathagata, or ‘Dhyan Chohan’, to protect and watch over, not to interfere with it.”

Here the identification of the Dhyan Chohans with the Tathagatas is unambiguous. Thus the Dhyan Chohans are as little to be viewed as “God” in the theistic sense as are the Tathagatas. Also it is clear that in Theosophical usage the conception of Parabrahman is not to be viewed in the theistic sense. So we must conclude that there is no discrepancy between Theosophy and Buddhism as to their respective views with respect to a theistic “God.” The writer would like to add a question suggested by the above quotations. Is Sukhavati the same as the “Buddha Lands”?

(c) The third point raised concerns the nature of Ultimate Reality. The correspondent points out that Theosophy teaches *Svabhava*, which suggests a substantive character, while the Buddhism of the Orientalists teaches *Svabhava-shunyata* (all things are empty in their self-nature), which suggests a radical positivism and, indeed, to many minds, absolute annihilation. Here we face what is probably the most abstruse and difficult feature of both teachings, and the derivation of a clear conception of what is meant by either teaching is by no means easy. However, some facts are definite and easily understood.

First of all, it should be noted that while in some sense there is substantial agreement among Buddhist sects on the doctrine of *anatman*, there is great divergence in the treatment of Ultimate Reality. McGovern says (53), “On no point is the diversity of Buddhist philosophy so exemplified as on that of its various theories of the nature of Ultimate Reality.” As a consequence, we cannot contrast traditional Buddhism as a totality with Theosophical teaching with respect to this point. To show a contrast one must pick the teaching of particular sects or schools or particular sutras. All that is then shown is at most that there is a contradiction between Theosophical teaching and that of the sect or school chosen. To go further and say that the contradiction is between Theosophy and Buddhism as such implies the prior judgment that the given sect or school is identical with authentic Buddhism, while all adverse Buddhist teachings in other sects or schools are in error and apocryphal. Certainly, unless such a judgment is adequately documented, it is arbitrary. A clear and concise picture of the differences between five of the schools of Buddhism is formulated by McGovern, so perhaps the simplest course would be to quote from him. He gives the following summary (54-55):

1. *Primitive Buddhism*, or psychological agnosticism, for which no attempt is made to explore the recesses of the noumenal world, and no theories concerning ultimate realities are postulated.

2. *Hinayana Buddhism* teaches a materialistic realism, that the universe consists of a certain small number of elements, uncreated, that enter into combination in accordance with causal law, unconnected with any supernatural law giver.
3. *The Madhyamika School of Mahayana* broke up these elements into components parts, and stated that there is only a fluid, fluctuating stream of life, and that therefore all seemingly unchanging phenomena have only a conceptual existence.
4. *The Yogachara School of Mahayana* called this stream of life Essence of Mind or the Alaya Vijnana, which is no less fluid or devoid of eternal particularity. The evolution of this Essence of Mind brings about the phenomenal universe.
5. *Chinese and Japanese Mahayana* (especially the Tendai and Kegon sects) has developed the theory of the Absolute latent in the foregoing conceptions, and states that the Bhutatathata is both the Norm and Pure form.

Assuming that the foregoing is a substantially correct representation of the Orientalist's view of Buddhism, a brief discussion of the five theories may be of profit to us.

1. The primitive Buddhism would seem to be closer to the actual public teaching of Gautama Buddha Himself. It is said that He taught publicly only a practical or ethical doctrine and was silent upon metaphysical questions, since discussion of these would be only confusing for those who were not prepared. But there is also a tradition that He gave further teachings to His qualified disciples, and the claim is made by proponents of the Mahayana that their metaphysical teachings are derived from these. These contentions imply that we did have an esoteric doctrine as is maintained by Theosophy. In any case, in this instance, it is impossible to predicate a contradiction between Buddhism and Theosophy.
2. There is doubtless a greater or lesser incompatibility between Hinayana materialistic realism and Theosophy. An extensive study of Theosophy gradually brings out the fact that it is neither realistic nor idealistic but occupies a sort of middle position and is capable of accommodating itself to both views. However, it is inconceivable that its teachings would ever suggest to anyone a nihilistic materialism, while Hinayana Buddhism seemed to be such to Rhys Davids.
3. The Madhyamika teaching, as given above, suggests much the view of Vitalism, in Western philosophic classifications. Especially can one see a similarity to the views of Schopenhauer, who posited the Will as the ontological principle while the Idea constituted the basis of the phenomenal. Schopenhauer expressly stated that the Will is essentially identical with Life, the latter being the Will manifested. As for Theosophy, one of his terms for the all-in-all is "The One Life," as is shown, for instance, in the following quotation from *The Mahatma Letters* (129), "We call it 'Immortal' but the one *Life* in its universal collectivity and entire or Absolute Abstraction; that which has neither beginning nor end, nor any break in its continuity." Thus, to this extent, at least, there is no disagreement between the teachings of the Madhyamika school and Theosophy.
4. The Yogachara School, in viewing the stream of life as the Alaya Vijnana accentuates different facet from the preceding. "Alaya Vijnana" is commonly translated "essence of mind," but McGovern suggests "Receptacle Consciousness." Since "Alaya" means literally "home" or

“seat,” it readily suggests the meaning of “Basis” or “Root.” Hence we would just as well call it “Root Consciousness,” with the same meaning as “Absolute Consciousness.” The shift in accentuation is from “Life” to “Consciousness.” This suggests a certain similarity to the Hegelian philosophy. “Absolute Consciousness” is one of the terms employed for designating the Ultimate Reality. This is documented by the following quotations from *The Secret Doctrine*:

It (the Ultimate Reality) is the ONE LIFE, eternal, invisible, yet omnipresent, without beginning or end, yet periodical in its regular manifestations - between which periods reigns the dark mystery of Non-Being; unconscious, yet absolute Consciousness, unrealizable; yet the one self-existing reality; truly, “a Chaos to the sense, a Kosmos to the Reason.” (*Secret Doctrine*, 3rd ed., Vol. I, 32.)

Parabrahman, the One Reality, the absolute, is the field of Absolute Consciousness, i.e., that Essence which is out of all relation to conditioned existence, and of which conscious existence is a conditioned symbol. But once we pass in thought from this (to us) Absolute Negation, duality supervenes in the contrast of Spirit (or Consciousness) and Matter, Subject and Object. (*Secret Doctrine*, 3rd ed., Vol. I, 43.)

There are “Seven Paths” or “Ways” to the “Bliss” of Non-Existence, which is absolute Being, Existence and Consciousness. (*Secret Doctrine*, 3rd ed., Vol. I, 70.)

In the Occult teachings the Unknown and Unknowable Mover, of the Self-Existing, is the Absolute Divine Essence. And thus being Absolute Consciousness, and Absolute Motion - to the limited senses of those who describe this indescribable - it is unconsciousness and immovableness. (*Secret Doctrine*, 3rd ed., Vol. I, 86.)

It would appear from these quotations that there is no contradiction between Theosophy and the primary teaching or the Yogachara School as given above.

5. The conception of the Tendai and Kegon sects that the Absolute, or Bhutatathata is both Supreme Idea and the fundamental essence or all life appears as something of a synthesis of the two foregoing views. It approximates the view of von Hartmann, who really synthesized Hegel and Schopenhauer. From what is already written it should be clear that this view does not suggest a contradiction with Theosophy.

The doctrine of the “Shunyata” (Voidness, Emptiness, Nothingness) is characteristic of the Mahayana, according to McGovern, and is particularly developed in the “Shraddhotpada Shastra,” believed to have been written by Ashvaghosa. It is said that this shastra is viewed as orthodoxy by all branches of the Mahayana. In this teaching the Absolute is said to have two phases, the Unmanifest and the manifest. The Shunya conception occurs in the detailed explanation of the Unmanifest phase. We quote McGovern's condensed statement of this.

The UNMANIFESTED PHASE is the Ideal World; the underlying unity; the quintessence of all being. It is the eternal sameness under all apparent difference. Owing to our subjective activity (men) we build up a vision of a discrete, particularized universe, but in reality the essence of things ever remains one, void of particularity. Being absolute it is not nameable or explicable. It cannot be rendered in any form of language. It is without the range of perception. It may be termed Shunya or the Void, because it is not a fixed or limited entity; but a perpetual becoming,

void of self-existent component parts. It may likewise be termed Ashunya, the FULL or the Existent, because when confused subjectivity has been destroyed we perceive the pure soul manifestation itself as eternal, permanent, immutable, and completely comprising all things that are pure. (*Secret Doctrine*, 3rd ed., Vol. I, 62.)

The important point to note in this quotation is that the Ultimate is viewed as both Shunya and Ashunya, or both Void and Full. It all depends upon the perspective. In this connection the attention is directed to the phrase “this (to us) Absolute Negation” in the second quotation from *The Secret Doctrine* (33). The development of the conception of the Ultimate Reality as absolute negation is nothing more nor less than the Shunya doctrine. The impression of apparent contradiction can be derived from the sutras that develop the Shunyata Doctrine with exclusive emphasis, but it is evidently an error to view this sort of statement as comprising the full meaning of the Mahayana. On the whole, Theosophy emphasizes the positive view and so, if there is a difference on this point, it is one of emphasis rather than of essence.

From the statement of pedagogical considerations it is very questionable whether emphasis on the Shunya aspect would help to advance the acceptance of the Dharma by activist Western individuals.

Summing up - the Theosophic teaching of *Svabhavat*, the One Element from whence proceeds both Spirit and Matter, both Subject and Object, is not in principle incompatible with Buddhist teaching in the Mahayana form, although it may be incompatible with the Hinayana.

Part VI

(d) On the question of whether or not Buddha taught an esoteric doctrine it is not necessary to say much. It may be that some sects deny an esoteric teaching, particularly among the Hinayanas. But one can find plenty of evidence of an esoteric tradition among the Mahayana schools, and so the Theosophical contention is not negated by Buddhism as a whole, at the very least. The story of Buddha’s maintaining silence when the monk Vacchagotta asked his questions simply implies that there was a teaching that was not given out generally. It has been said that Buddha did lift the veil of secrecy to some extent, but He by no means tore it down completely. The whole point of an esoteric teaching is founded on the difference in ethical character and developed understanding of different human beings. What is food for one may be poison for another.

To be sure, the correctness of the thesis that there is an esoteric doctrine that constitutes the heart of the Buddha’s teaching, as well as that of the Vedanta and of all the great religions, is not itself proof that Theosophy is derived from that source. In the nature of the case, objective proof to the uninitiated is impossible. At best, a presumption may be built, and each individual must decide for himself whether the presumption of truth developed is sufficiently strong to make the test with his life. This test may bring an incommunicable assurance, but in these matters certainty cannot be attained by he who is fearful of daring.

(e) 1. On the problem of phenomena associated with the person of H . P. Blavatsky, we are dependent as to the question of fact upon the testimony of individuals who in few or no instances are still among the living in this world. On the question of possibility of such phenomena, a presumptive attitude may be derived from both the philosophy of

Theosophy and of Buddhism. Both affirm the possibility of supernormal phenomena, of which the general philosophical rationale is easily understandable, however difficult it may be to understand the specific processes and to master the art. From the general thesis “nothing exists save as it is seen of the mind,” it is easy to see how, in principle, conscious voluntaristic production of effects in nature and the psyche is a possibility, once the general thesis is assumed or known to be true. The actual production given instances of phenomena could be valuable as a partial confirmation of the philosophy, or for the purpose of breaking down adverse skepticism in minds that were sincere and honest.

As to the actuality of the phenomena in question, the writer has nothing to offer on his own authority. There is the record and the published testimony, and the reader is referred to this as a basis for forming an independent evaluation and judgment.

As to the Coloumb affair and the Society for Psychic Research (SPR) report, the data has been collected, analyzed, and competently evaluated in a work called *The Theosophical Movement* (E.P. Dutton, 1925), and any student who wishes to reach a just and honest understanding should read this. The following quotation from this source strikes at the core of this matter. (See *The Theosophical Movement*, 91.)

In no one thing, perhaps, is the weakness of the S.P.R. investigation more fatally self-betraying than in the motives they assign to account for the long continued combination and deliberate deception instigated and carried out by Madame Blavatsky. That anyone, let alone a woman, should for ten or more years make endless personal sacrifice of effort, time, money, health and reputation on three continents, merely to deceive those who trusted her, with no possible benefit to herself; should succeed in so deceiving so many of the most intelligent men and women of many races that they were convinced of the reality of her powers, her teachings, her mission as well as her phenomena, only to be unmasked by a boy of twenty-three who, by interviewing some of the witnesses and hearing their stories, is able infallibly to see what they could not see, is able to suspect what they could find no occasion for suspecting, is able to detect a sufficient motive for inspiring H. P. B. to the most monumental career of chicanery in all history - this is what one has to swallow in order to attach credibility to the elaborate tissue of conjecture and suspicion woven by Mr. Hodgson to offset the solid weight of testimony that the phenomena were genuine.

“No crime without a motive.” What then was the motive attributed by Mr. Hodgson and the Committee to make credible their conclusion that she was “one of the most accomplished, ingenious, and interesting impostors in history?” SHE WAS A RUSSIAN SPY, AND HER MOTIVE WAS TO DESTROY BRITISH RULE IN INDIA!

As a matter of fact, one who has studied the whole question without prejudice is forced to the conclusion that the procedure of the SPR was incompetent and unjust and the motive of the members of the Committee suspect.

2., 3. & 4. The point has been raised that if the authors of *The Mahatma Letters* were Buddhists, as the writers themselves affirm they are, then there should have been material from sources not reached by Orientalists. In one instance of a translation, it is pointed out that it is really a paraphrase of Beal’s *Catena of Buddhist Scripture*, the apparent suggestion of the correspondent being that the *Letters* were a fabrication or a hoax. The writer fails to see how there is much force in this line of reasoning. Thus there is

nothing surprising that if two individuals independently translate from the same source that the results should be similar, but not identical, for the source is the same. Further, the writers of the *Letters* are, by hypothesis at least, masters of the inner essence of Buddhism and thus speak from out themselves what they know, rather than merely recite and copy.

It should always be borne in mind that these *Letters* were written to individuals and not for publication and general dissemination. There may be a question as to whether the publication of the *Letters* was just to either the writers or recipients, but to judge the *Letters* out of context of the specific problems of the time and the purpose for which they were written is less than just. However, since *The Mahatma Letters* have in fact been published it would seem to be our duty to evaluate them by the inherent worth of their content.

The correspondent writes, "My general impression of the letters is that they are gossipy and argumentative with a little philosophy, which had been better stated in a hundred other purely 'exoteric' books." It is presumed that anybody has a right to his general impressions. The writer too has his general impression. Let us oppose impression to impression, since such matters cannot be argued objectively. His impression is: The *Letters* reveal the activity of intelligences that in sheer range and depth have been surpassed by none in the whole range of literature with which he is acquainted; intelligences abreast of Western science and philosophies of the day, masters of the intricacies of the Oriental philosophies and religions, and of something far more profound, which man in the world cannot measure. Beyond this he has an impression of a selfless compassion and a patience rarely exemplified in human history. Finally, he has an impression of power combined with majesty in the best sense.

To be sure, the *Letters* are fragmentary, for reasons adequately explained. In part they deal with intimate personal problems of the time that were the concern of the recipients and the writers. The ideas are patiently argued so as to convince, rather than compel, those to whom they were sent. They reveal none of the spirit of categorical ex-cathedra dogmatism so characteristic of the religious and political dictator, and that, in the opinion of the writer, is one of their outstanding merits.

After twenty-three years of acquaintance with these *Letters*, the writer finds them an unexhausted source of knowledge and wisdom, of more worth than the total of all exoteric Vedanta and Buddhist literature that he has read. So much for testimony, which is, admittedly not objective argument.

5. The question of the use of terms in a different sense by Theosophy as contrasted to Buddhism, in the form available to Orientalists, proves nothing as to the authenticity of Theosophy. If once we grant the thesis that formulated Theosophy is derived from an enduring esoteric wisdom that, among other things, is identical with the hidden meaning of Gautama Buddha, then the fact that basic terms are interpreted in different ways is not only not surprising, but to be expected. The one all-important question is: "Is Theosophy what it claims to be?"

An objective and definitive answer to this question is impossible on exoteric grounds alone. A presumption one way or the other can be built, but that is all. To go beyond this, one must be willing to gamble his life in faith, though prior testing in every way that is possible is not only everyone's right, but is perfectly proper.

6. The correspondent writes: "Theosophy, far from revealing a more esoteric side of Mahayana Buddhism, does not rise to an elementary understanding of the publicly taught doctrines." So! How is anyone to decide this unless he is an Initiate? Among the early contributors to *The Theosophist* were high Buddhists who quite competently gave expositions of Buddhist teaching. But how is one to form a judgment on this matter? There are many Mahayana sects, Chinese, Japanese, and Tibetan and an enormous canon. Theosophy does not claim to be an exposition of all of this. There is not a doubt in the world that one can find sutras that build a different picture of the Mahayana Buddhism from that found in Theosophical teachings. But how shall it be decided which picture is authentic?
7. It is affirmed that Hindu and Buddhist terms are "mangled" and "jumbled," and that the whole forms a "labyrinth of ill digested concepts." Well, no doubt there is some indigestion, but who is it who has the stomach trouble, the writer or the reader of *The Secret Doctrine*? But seriously, there is an intermixed use of Hindu and Buddhist terms and, it might be added, Cabbalistic terms as well. But in what way is this surprising?

Let us recall the primary thesis of Theosophy that it is a formulation of a portion of the Esoteric Doctrine COMMON to the great religions and philosophies. Assuming the truth of this thesis, does it not follow that traces of the Doctrine will be found in the different systems? Naturally we would expect identity of conception underlying different terms and different approaches and organizations. Let us not forget that Theosophy aims at integration rather than an exclusive approval of one preferred extant system. It does not say that one must become a member of such and such a Buddhist or Vedantist sect, or he is hopelessly lost. Rather it says: "Clear the conceptions of the systems to which you are oriented of false and extraneous growths and then you will find revealed a facet of ultimate Truth. But remember that this is equally true of the outwardly different Systems to which some of your brothers belong."

By learning to see identity of meaning in seemingly quite different terms, progress is made toward unity and brotherhood. The effect would be quite different if it were said that everyone must become Buddhist, or everyone must become a Vedantist, or Cabbalist in the exclusive and separative sense. That spirit is definitely alien to Theosophy.

The plaint is often made by the reader of *The Secret Doctrine* that it uses so many words for the same thing and departs so often from the line of pure teaching into side-excursions, that the total effect is that of confusion. The writer can sympathize with this feeling and he admits that he would have found a clear-cut line more comfortable. But he who would find gold must go to nature and delve for it in the forms in which nature has provided it, and this is seldom upon a "silver platter."

Now, the ultimate Doctrine is half revealed and half concealed, and to understand it at all the student must work. He is spared long years or sitting cross-legged in a sealed-up cave, but he must use his mind and have patience. He must overcome prejudice. Thus it may be more natural for one to speak of Archangels, but he might learn to accept the fact that when others say "Elohim," "Kumara," "Dhyana Chohan," "Dhyana Buddha," "Ahi," or "Tathagata," they mean, knowingly or not, with greater or less understanding, the same thing.

The extensive side-excursions one finds in *The Secret Doctrine* are not intended to increase confusion, but mainly to build up presumptive evidence, not only to support, but also to render

more acceptable the primary thesis. To be sure, the excursion that helps one may not help another, and vice versa, but the announced purpose is to help all, as far as may be, and not merely a preferred few. Further, the central doctrine is largely in the form of fragments and hints, partly because there were reasons why all could not be given explicitly, and also partly because the student must earn the right to understanding by work.

Part of *The Secret Doctrine* is obsolete today because a cross-sectional view of Western science now is different when compared with what it was in 1888. As a result, quite an amount of the polemical material would no longer be needed or would have to be changed as to form. The writer is convinced that the positive help or support from science today would be far greater, but all this involves no change in the meaning of the central Doctrine.

Some temperaments object to the lengthy arguments that run all through the basic Theosophic literature. They would have preferred definite categorical pronouncements. But on this point the announced policy of the real founders was definite and for reason. Bare assertion of conceptions, no matter how true they may be, implies upon the part of the reader blind acceptance or rejection, and injects the spirit of authoritarianism. The founders were emphatically opposed to this. To be sure, there are individuals who need little more than bare statements to awaken the "Inner Eye," but the Theosophical writings are not aimed at these who need little or no help at all. For the rest, the policy was to build as convincing a case as possible, leaving the student free to decide, in the light of the presented evidence and reason, what appeared true to his uncoerced consciousness. To many, the writer among them, this attitude constitutes one of the strongest appeals of Theosophical literature.

8. & 9. These two points are really interconnected and so will be handled together. There can be no question but that one can receive the impression from much of Mahayana literature that the labor toward the salvation of all creatures is a perennial task, rather than a passing crisis. On the other hand, Theosophical literature does emphasize certain critical junctures such as the present, which is said to be the cycle or transition between the first 5000 years of Kali Yuga and a subsequent period. But this hardly involves any contradiction, since logically both standpoints could be valid. A perennial condition could, quite conceivably, have critical phases. But this matter becomes considerably less simple when it is borne in mind that Theosophical teaching does give the impression of accentuation of the activistic factor while both Buddhism and Hinduism strike one as more oriented to quietism. In its deeper ramifications the ultimate question becomes: Does Enlightenment imply the permanent transcendence of the activistic or evolutionary process, or does it have some interconnection with this process?

In its exoteric form, both the Vedanta and Buddhism give the impression that the whole meaning of Liberation or Enlightenment is the correction of error. The correction of the error leads to transcendence of the World-field and all dualistic consciousness in essentially the same way that a dream is destroyed by awakening. Thus to the awakened consciousness there is no more activity in the sense of an evolutionary process. In contrast, Theosophy views the active phase as fundamental as the inactive or unmanifested phase. Enlightenment has the value of New Birth before which lie both active and passive possibilities. To be Enlightened is to be an Adept, and no one is an Adept in the Theosophical sense who is not Enlightened. There are seven degrees of Enlightenment and the full Buddha is one who has culminated all these seven steps. A full Adept is the same thing as a full Buddha, and the Tathagata is the same thing as a Dhyana Chohan, a

guiding Intelligence in Nature.

It is easy to see that Theosophy implies an Enlightenment such that the resultant consciousness is a sort of fusion of the unmanifested with the manifested aspects, or of nondualistic into dualistic consciousness. In this state the error or delusion is destroyed, but action, including evolution, and quietude both remain. There is the refusal to accept the private enjoyment of the Bliss of Nirvana, while including the meaning of continued effort in the direction of redemption of all creatures, as well as other and even more fundamental values - values that would still remain although all creatures were finally redeemed.

The writer does not mean to suggest that the inner meaning of both the Vedanta and Buddhism is at variance with Theosophy in the above respect. There may be inner agreement, and, indeed, this seems very likely. But the other impression does exist and there is literature that at least seems to confirm it. It is with respect to this latter impression that a contradiction exists.

As a matter of strict logic neither action nor inaction can be predicated of a non-dual Reality, and it is thus as close to the active phase as to the inactive.

There can be no doubt that the appeal of the active or inactive phases appeals differently to individuals and races of different temperaments. One may prefer inactive contemplation while the other prefers activity. But such preference has no force as a determinant of the nature of ultimate Reality. Western man is, on the whole, activist while Eastern man is more largely quietistic, but neither is therefore more right or righteous than the other.

We have been comparing doctrines that, as the Oriental would say, exist in terms of name and form, as indeed that is all that is possible to be compared and discussed. All three, Theosophy, Vedanta, and Buddhism, agree in saying that the ultimately true Dharma or Theosophia transcends all name and form, all possibility or definition in any way. For this, to relative consciousness, appears exclusively as Absolute Negation, or That of which nothing whatsoever can be predicated in the private sense. Before THIS, all beings whatsoever, high or low, must stand SILENT in the face of utter MYSTERY.

OM TAT SAT

http://www.katinkahesselink.net/other/m_wolff.html