

Transcript of *The Philosopher's Stone*

“A video made to help preserve the ashram built by Franklin Merrell-Wolff.”

Produced by Faustin Bray & Brooks Dwyer
1940 film clip by Fay Orr

Narrator:

This is a story told in the words of Franklin Merrell-Wolff, mathematician and philosopher. In film shot forty years ago and other recently recorded footage, Dr. Wolff tells the story of the construction of a granite building 8000 feet up a mountainside near Lone Pine, California.

Wolff:

The idea was to find a place near the tallest mountain in the country.

Narrator:

The sight of the Ashram, once designated a primitive area, has now been restated as a “wilderness area.” According to Forestry Service regulations beginning in 1964, mechanized vehicles and buildings are not permitted in wilderness areas. Because of this legislative change, the Ashram must be declared “historically significant” and allowed to stand, or it will be demolished by the Forestry Service. The purpose of this film is to save the Ashram, built by Dr. Wolff and his wife, Sherifa.

Wolff:

We, in 1929, made the location and got the permit. And then began up in 1930. So, off and on, during the vacations, for about 20 years we worked on that. Well we enjoyed it you know—the process of achieving may be even more interesting than the achievement! (Chuckles) We had a lot of fun as well as a lot of hard work. Now there was no flat there, we made the flat, and you couldn't move six inches in that ground without hitting rock; so, we had to blast our way.

I handled all the dynamite because I was the only one that had any experience with it. And it's not a thing you share with other people, it's got to be in one hand, for there can be mistakes. Dynamite is moderately sensitive, and percussion caps very sensitive—fulminate of mercury should be handled with extreme care; they go off both by percussion and by fire. As the rock was piling up, I got the idea, Why not use this to build the building? That's what we did.

You may say the ultimate objective is to facilitate, as far as possible, development toward that event which, when achieved, is known as Fundamental Realization or Enlightenment. We had evenings, of course, where we met informally; but we had also the periods of serious effort—serious instruction. Well it was the joint work of the two of us. And it wasn't the whole of our work by any means, as we had the work in town. We also gave lectures in different cities.

Narrator:

Near the Ashram and 2,000 feet lower in altitude, the home of Dr. Wolff welcomes all who find it. A widespread audience attend the regular Sunday gatherings. The soft-spoken scholarly resident warmly greets people from all the continents. Browsing around the office library, one sees that Dr. Wolff is surrounded by volumes of mathematical and mystical literature, portraits of people who inspired him, and just outside the window, the foothills of the Sierra. The combination of earthly pinnacles, lofty ideals, and highly developed concepts keep a dedicated group participating in the weekly meetings regardless of the seasonal adverse weather conditions.

In fact, Dr. Wolff's work has recently gained popularity. An increasing proportion of the general public, along with academic students and professionals, is recognizing his life's effort in philosophy and mathematics. Many of the people who have taken an interest in Dr. Wolff's writing find their way to the Ashram. Almost all hikers return saying the 8,000 foot climb to the Ashram is a breathtaking experience.

In keeping with the independent, industrious spirit of his life with his first wife, Sherifa, he and his second wife, Gertrude, built his present home when he was 73 years old. Dr. Wolff runs his own generator, getting sufficient electricity to supply his household twelve hours per day. His water source is a nearby stream. He does not use telephone. He goes to town twice a week for supplies and mail, weather permitting; and other than the occasional journey by car, Dr. Franklin Merrell-Wolff remains studiously at home. The exchange of ideas, the peace, and surroundings, present a haven for students of philosophy. Dr. Wolff invites challenge to his theories and animatedly attends questions and conversation with anecdotes, examples and remarkably diverse factual associations. He speaks freely, and with a generally humorous attitude, about his three published works: *Pathways Through to Space*, *The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object*, and *Introception*.*

In a short introduction to his philosophy, he jokingly remarks:

* The name of the third volume was *Introceptualism: The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object, Volume 2*, which was published by a group of Wolff's students using the trade name Phoenix Philosophical Press. At the time of this video, the first two volumes were published by Julian Press.

Wolff:

I've managed to survive for 93 years. . . . My keynote, as it were?

Narrator:

Yes. As it is, in fact.

Wolff:

Hmm . . . it might have been the tendency to drive toward the Root that awakened in this life. By the 'Root', I mean That from which all comes, which in Indian philosophy, in the Vedantic form, is *Brahman*, but that's just a name; in Buddhist terms, the *Void*—a void to relative consciousness, not a void to Ultimate Consciousness. That's probably the most central driving principle, tendency—to seek the Root. By analysis, in my case, which is the Shankara pattern, which fits me, a "peeling down" as it were, to that most ultimate, which is That which is neither an object before consciousness nor a subject to consciousness, and the name for it is *consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject*. So the ultimate principle is consciousness, but not what we call "relative consciousness," but a Primary Consciousness. So in the ultimate sense, I do reject the conception of the unconscious, except in the relative sense—that relative to one state of consciousness, another state may be unconscious, but not from its own point of view.

Narrator:

What are those mountains you see up there?

Wolff (pointing out the window):

Well, these are the Sierra Nevada. But you don't see any of the main peaks, they're further back . . . we're too near to see them.

The Forest Supervisor who had his headquarters at Bishop passed on it. I think I still have papers; and we paid every year the amount required, and actually, there was a requirement that a building should be put up, you see, which was done. And then they changed the classification of the land to Wilderness Area that doesn't permit that sort of thing, and there's a legal question whether one's right is not more fundamental than change of classification that follows.

Visitor:

I go to the Ashram a lot, whenever I can. I've gone there for years.

Narrator:

Do you want to describe it?

Visitor:

It's made out of stone, and it's in the shape of a cross, the walls are in the shape of a cross, and there's doors at each of the corners and windows on several of the ends of the cross, looking out to incredible views of mountain; and there's an altar in there. I'm interested in spirituality; I've encountered a lot of groups, and this group gives me a good perspective because a lot of the groups I see are young people who think we know a lot and think we're new. "Nobody's ever done this before," you know. And then you come here and these folks have been doing it for a long time.

Wolff:

It is not religious in the sense of emphasis of ritual and dogma because, for my part especially, I emphasize the inquiring, critical intelligence. Our Ashram up there is a balanced cross. The principle of equilibrium is implied in it, it's not the cross of sacrifice, which is the Latin cross; no, we emphasize the principle of equilibrium.

I rather think it could have been fought in the courts because we were within our legal rights when we had the property: it does not seem to be a principle of equity that if they change classification that thereby former arrangements become illegal.