

## A Biographical Profile of Franklin Merrell-Wolff

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FRANKLIN FOWLER WOLFF was born July 11, 1887 at 2:00 in the afternoon in Pasadena California. His father was a Methodist minister with a rather universal approach. Dr. Wolff's pre-college education was in San Fernando. He later attended Stanford University and then did graduate work at Harvard. While in college he began to be interested in his spiritual education (although his questioning began much before this). He was particularly interested in, as we know from his writings, Sri Shankaracharya (Shankara).

After teaching a year at Stanford (he taught mathematics during a professor's sabbatical), he spent some time at a ranch south of Carmel, and then landed at the Temple of People at Halcyon. He was drafted in October 1917 and entered the spruce production division in the state of Washington. When he left the service in 1919 he returned to Halcyon. It was here he married Sherifa the following year. After Frances LaDue, the theosophical leader of this area, passed in, Dr. Wolff and Sherifa left this area. Mrs. LaDue was a deep influence on them, and she was sometimes called "Blue Star."

It was at this time that Sherifa studied with Alice Bailey and then met Inayat Khan, the great Sufi mystic. The latter gave Sherifa her name. In 1928 Hari Rama, a Hindu monk, arrived in the States from India. He was of the Kriya Yoga school (as was Paramhansa Yogananda). It was during this period that Franklin Wolff wrote under the name of Yogagnani (*Re-embodiment, On Yoga*).

In 1936 Dr. Wolff had his Realizations. These are, of course, the most significant events in his life, and in fact, the basis of his life. He wrote *Pathways Through to Space and Consciousness Without an Object* under a rather special influence of Sherifa (as he notes in *Pathways*):

In many ways, down through the years, Sherifa has never allowed me to forget the call whispered through the suffering of others. For my own part, I was content to unite with Space alone, but the justice of her claim for these others I could not deny . . . it was the words and love of Sherifa, who never forgets these others, that were ultimately decisive.<sup>1</sup>

Franklin and Sherifa were married thirty-nine years until her death on February 23, 1959.

Dr. Wolff married Gertrude Adams in 1960 and was married to her for 18 years before she died on her birthday in 1978. During his marriage to Gertrude, Dr. Wolff made several hundred hours of tapes (many of which have been transcribed, although only a few are in finished form<sup>2</sup>).

Immanuel Kant was a strong influence on Dr. Wolff, as was the great Indian mystic Sri Aurobindo, and also the analytical psychologist Carl G. Jung. Dr. Wolff developed a deep love of music about the time of Sherifa's death and since Gertrude had a profound talent in music, this

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<sup>1</sup> From "The Final Record" in *Pathways Through to Space*.

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to the work of Bruce Raden, most of these recordings have now been transcribed in "final form."

interest continued. He has a special love of Wagner with an accompanying knowledge of Wagnerian symbology. Parsifal is his favorite.

There are many areas of interest for Dr. Wolff that might be called hobbies. He became quite interested in prospecting and spent time in Michigan Bluff (California) prospecting for gold. He met the famous (infamous?) Shorty Harris, also called "Dean of the Desert Rats," who was one of the true old-time prospectors. This was during Dr. Wolff's exploration of Death Valley, the Singing Sands, and other areas. He became interested in mining because Sherifa's son, James Briggs, became a mining engineer.

Dr. Wolff learned all he could on the subject and became easily conversant with mining professionals. He at one time was also interested in finance and read all there was available on the financiers of the time. He still keeps up in this area through weekly reading of *U.S. News and World Report* (as well as keeping informed politically).

Another of his major interests was traveling. This occurred mainly during his seventies (at which time he had just completed building his second home). He made two trips to Alaska during this time and several trips to various parts of the United States. There are forty reels of film on the one trip to Alaska alone (Gertrude was an excellent photographer). He and Gertrude hired a pilot and flew around Mt. Denali (McKinley) on one of the few days the cloud cover lifted.

Franklin Wolff is a great story teller. It is delightful to listen to his stories as he tells of his personal experiences which cover a lot of years, remembering how it was before the automobile, etc., and he tells of practical jokes, his experiences with the donkeys during the days of building the Ashrama, he tells personal stories of great philosophers and mathematicians, and so much more.

He is not a vegetarian, which sometimes dismays visitors with expectations. He states that he feels enlightenment is not a result of what you eat (or don't eat). He does not, however, over indulge and is always moderate, even at a Thanksgiving feast. He enjoys a glass of white port before meals.

Dr. Wolff does smoke (having developed an early taste for Turkish cigarettes which he has forsaken for Pall Malls). Although enveloped in a cloud of smoke he claims he does not inhale. However, at age ninety-six the MDs admit it has not greatly affected his health. He often neglects the cigarette, particularly while engaged in discussion, and the ash grows precariously long and inevitably falls.

He has a great sense of humor, and excepting a few practical jokes (e.g., giving raccoons a caramel on which to chew and chew and chew), his humor is subtle. His eyes often twinkle as he observes or anticipates a response.

The love of the out-of-doors has always been intense with Dr. Wolff. He inherited an orange grove in San Fernando when he was in his early years and literally spent all day tending it with great love while he contemplated truly profound thoughts. When first at Lone Pine during the summers he would spend the whole of every day in the alfalfa fields and tending fields of berries, melons, corn, and squash. He had a particular fondness of goats (and here are more stories) and found them a great source of amusement. Although there were a few sheep in the apple orchard, he was not very interested in them as he had absolutely no admiration for their intelligence.

His favorite books are: *Mahatma Letters*, *Voice of the Silence*, *The System of the Vedanta*, *Shankara's Commentary on the Brahmasutras* by Paul Deussen, and more recently, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

In summary, I shall quote from a paper Sherifa wrote as a potential forward for *Pathways*:

I think the greatest things I have observed (in Franklin Wolff) are his utter truthfulness, his very real modesty, his unusual intellectual insight and the depth of his spiritual unfoldment.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> From Sherifa's foreword to the original manuscript of *Pathways Through to Space*, which at the time was titled "From Point-I to Space-I."