

P. O. Box 143
Claremont, California
KresB (Res: 121 N. Brooks)
July 4, 1948

Dr. Franklin Merrell-Wolff
Address Unknown
San Fernando ?

Dear Dr. Merrell-Wolff,

I am writing to you on a funny old typewriter having three shift banks instead of two. The nerve-muscle complex of my fingers does not understand it. Why I use it at all I don't know, except I feel like doing so.

It was my friend Professor Chas J. Ryan at the Theosophical headquarters, Covina, who first introduced to me your book, Pathways through to Space. He said that it and Yram's Practical Astral Projection would be his two bibles the rest of his days. It was I who called his attention to Yram, I believe. He said that if he were younger he thought he could realize some major truth through your point of view. For myself, I keep your book always near at hand and read in it often.

I have been at this illumination business for some time. I am sorry to say I have not yet 'Whit the great light'. Probably I have not yet wanted it as badly as a drowning man wants air and there have been lots of other little desires which Our Merry Lady has given her child for amusement.

Hobbies? A kind of space intoxication for steppe deserts, mesas, and pine forests (but especially the red rocks) of the Northern Arizona type of country. Not much worldly-ambitious; not enough to support my family as well as I should. Graduate of Reed College, Portland, Oregon, philosophy major. Age 29. Married. Baby daughter. Six-year old son by a former marriage. Much interest in Buddhism, Vedanta, and mystics of whatever religion. Other influences: Ramakrishna, Theosophy, Max Heindel, Krishnamurti, Karel Weinfurter, Astrology, Mr. Layne's Round Robin and FR, Alice Bailey, Regardie. (These are far from constituting a consistent system; I try to weigh and balance the merits of each.)

I joined the Theosophical Society (Point Loma, Covina) in 1936 and in 1946 my wife and I lived at the Covina headquarters as staff members, where, among other things, I taught a class in Western philosophy at their college. At present I have objections or doubts about Theosophy which I might group under these headings:

1. Historical. Mme Blavatsky, the Mahatma Letters, the origin of the T.S.
2. ~~Official~~ Oriental philosophy and other points of scholarship. Terms misapplied, philosophies not understood (whole general attitude has a different slant).
3. Scientific. Especially archaeological and geological objections to human civilization being 18 million years old on earth instead of nearer 7000.
4. Religious. Does not satisfy my religious impulses or urges toward monism.

I don't know to what extent these particular questions interest you, but I shall expand these points in the hope that you may have some comment to offer.

1. Historical. Too many of Mme. Blavatsky's phenomena resemble card tricks and stage magic for me to feel easy about them. Physical phenomena under non-controlled conditions are evidentially valueless. The SPR report seems very damaging. The Coulomb affair is hard to explain away. Gertrude Marvin William's Priestess of the Occult summarizes previous damaging evidence and presents a very plausible reconstruction of her career and motives. The brothers Hare (Who Wrote the Mahatma Letters?) make some damaging points about these letters. The Mahatmas, though calling themselves Buddhists, knew less about Buddhism than the scholars of 1880 knew. They say, of Buddhist scriptures, "permit me to translate, and then paraphrase Beal's Gatana of Buddhist Scriptures. They never offer to translate any previously untranslated scriptures, of which there were far more untranslated than translated. Just one point among many. And my general impression of the letters is that they are gossip and argumentative with a little philosophy, which had been better stated in a hundred other purely "exoteric" books. The question is, then, 'Was Madame a "phoney"?'

2. Oriental scholarship. Buddhism: Theosophy is puṅgalvādin (attavāda), believing in at least the partial importance of selves, egos; refers often to ātman and to various ego-centers constituting the person. Buddhism puts anātman in central place. Th. refers to svabhāva (and the Nepalese svabhāvikas); Buddhism teaches svabhāvasūnyatā -- all things are empty in their self-nature. This is a matter perhaps of relative emphasis, not perhaps of absolute difference. The five Jinas are called Dhyāni Buddhas, an unusual Nepalese terminology. Th. uses nirmāṇakāya to mean a bodhisattva who is not physical but working on the astral plane. The Buddhist nirmāṇakāya ~~includes~~ includes those living in the physical. The pāramitās are not explained in Voice of the Silence as if Mme. B. knew what they were.

And thus we could elaborate. It may sound like fussiness over terms but the philosophy gets mangled in the process. It tends to show that Mme. B. didn't know much about Buddhism. Hinduism Theosophy, far from revealing a more esoteric side of Mahāyāna Buddhism, does not even rise to an elementary understanding of the publicly taught doctrines. A Zen Buddhist in particular would have no use for "technical" theosophy" with its labyrinth of ill-digested concepts. Theosophy has a universal samsāra of gods, super gods, super gods, ad infinitum, evolution or progress without end; all absolutes (nirvāṇa, dharmakāya, Ādi Buddha) are merely relative. If true, it is scarcely an encouraging thought to the samsāra-weary pilgrim like myself. Para-nirvāṇa (and para para mahā mahā nirvāṇa, too, I suppose) is stacked up on top of nirvāṇa as an even more blown-out sort of blown-outness than blown-outness itself (A "more Egyptian sort of darkness" than absolute darkness itself.) Of course the prajñā of the bodhisattva is in a sense beyond nirvāṇa and sees samsāra and nirvāṇa as one. You too explain this matter so I can believe it, but Th. makes one feel it is all just more and more samsāra (Americans, believing in "super-progress", can't stand the thought of anything being over and done with.)

Hindu terms are similarly mangled and the worst thing of all is that Hindu and Buddhist terminology is all jumbled up together without distinction. Of course I too feel that Buddhism and Vedānta, underneath the terminologies (Rāmakrishna has recently written a book on this), and the quarrels of the mediaeval Indian scholastic philosophers, are essentially the same, but I don't like such a slipshod method of showing it.

General ~~General~~ attitudes, theosophy vs. Indian thought:

Th. feels a great urgency to save the world from some terrible crisis which is always just pending. The need to go out proselytizing, however little one has realized personally. ~~Seek out him who knows still less than though thou.~~ The Buddhist bodhisattva works for the world's salvation, but not under crisis; it is a perpetual need, samsāra being always with us. On the other side, Ramakrishna said no one need lecture about God unless he has a commission from God Himself to do so, meanwhile never mind lecturing but try to realize Him yourself.

Th. worries about the dark forces (black magicians) as some sort of equal and opposite power whom one must overcome. (Evans-Wentz has pointed out the misunderstandings about Tibetan red-caps being all 'black' and the misuse of the term dugpa -- especially in a pamphlet polemic against Basil Crump, who criticized the wicked tantric doctrines of his Tibetan Book of the Dead.) Vivekananda says to resist not evil. A Rākshasa is, to the illumined Yogi, not an opponent to be overcome, but something to be known from the inside as non-separate from everything else. The Rākshasa is, if powerful, still part of the samsāric host. Thus dualism becomes in Theosophy of more practical importance than monism, which remains dimly in the background.

Th

Th. has an endless hierarchy of super-gods (Dhyān Chohans) above "our nirvana" or the "brahman of our solar system". Buddhism pays the gods scant respect; brahmā is only the most powerful, right now, of samsāric beings. But then Buddhism elaborated celestial Buddhas & Bodhisattvas and it is not clear to me whether any of these are beyond the prajñā-vision of a merely human Bodhisattva. Vedānta considers the lower gods as samsāric beings and the higher gods as personalized aspects, for worship, of the one nirguṇa brahman. To say any gods are beyond the brahman of our system would be thought of as nonsense.

In a rough way we could say Th. is activistic, like Americans, and Buddh. & Hind. contemplative (activity to save others should come after self-realization).

Since I have elaborated point 2 at such length, I'll let the archaeological problems (point 3) go for now, and point 4 is briefly that I would like to come to rest in some final, absolute realization, that I don't like to proselytize when I don't understand the truth myself, that ~~bodhisattvahood is far away and unattainable until after many lives of working in the~~ ^{and I don't want to be told that}

* *Ādi-Buddha would surely be the absolute or limit of any Buddha, even a celestial one (dīna).*

printing press or distributing theosophical literature until some Mahatma invites me to be a probationary chela where I have odds on becoming a great one like the theosophical leaders themselves. M (At least by that time I would want to get my Buddhist terminology straight and leave the card tricks alone).

My wife and I were disappointed in the theosophical headquarters' gossip, personality problems, power politics (unrecognized by lack of insight into one's own motives), activity without contemplation. The thought of Ramakrishna's renunciation, bhakti, and contemplation were too great a contrast.

If one wants guidance in some sort of mystical practice one is told that one must have spotless purity and many virtues before one starts or practical mysticism is very dangerous (one might become a black magician or go crazy). Frankly I find virtue quite impossible. I suspect the unilluminated personal self, unaided, is congenitally incapable of it. After ten years of these studies I am as unvirtuous as I was to start, though I am a bit more detached and have seen the emptiness of most accepted life-goals. I suspect that virtues are a by-product of mystical attainment, not a prerequisite for starting out, and that these leaders simply do not know what to teach one.

There must be a decided contrast between the occult or magical way and the way of the mystic. The former might well be dangerous without "spotless purity" before one starts. And since I can't imagine anyone with such virtue before he starts, this may well be a path best left untrod. But since the mystic only entrusts self to the care of a loving father (or to the care of Our Merry Lady), praying for more capacity for bhakti or insight - jñāna - as the case may be, one does not see what danger there would be to it.

I would like to meet you personally for a talk, assuming you live no farther away than San Fernando. Please suggest a time when I may see you.

Sincerely yours,

Harry B. Murphy

Harry Murphy

I managed to find an old Flying Roll subscriber list which Mr. Layne once sent. It has your address on it.

Do you know a Mr. Wend Roasted (Academy of Equilibrium), Pasadena?

P.O.Box 628,
San Fernando, Calif.,
Nov. 23, 1948.

Mr. Harry B. Murphy,
Claremont, Calif.

Dear Mr. Murphy:

Please forgive the long delay in answering your most interesting letter. The reasons for the delay are two-fold. First, at the time of receiving the letter, the writer was extremely busy with the work of establishing a retreat some distance north of here and, second, the problems raised by the letter were of such a nature and importance that they could not be handled reasonably without extended discussion. At the time of reception of the letter it was impossible to do this, but now I have had the time.

In as much as questioning of the authenticity of Theosophy, from similar angles to those which you have raised, have recently been brought to my attention also by others than yourself, it seemed to me to be desirable to handle the problems in the general form of a thesis. The enclosed paper is a copy of this. You will note that I have been guided very largely by your formulation of the issues as they cover the ground very well. My thanks are due to you for your excellent presentation of the issue.

Some of your problems which are more personal to you I have not discussed in the thesis. Some of these may be taken up here.

First as to the dangers from the black or left-hand side. There is indeed a place of security where these dangers do not exist and one speaking from such a level may view them as unreal. But there are dangers of the Way. On this general point I do not find a divergence between exoteric Buddhism and Theosophy, though definition of the nature of the danger may vary more or less. Why does the word "Refuge" recur so often in Buddhist literature? There must be something which renders the notion of a refuge necessary and the very meaning of the word is "shelter or protection from danger or distress". Whether we view the danger as a complex in the psyche or as embodied in an entity or entities, such as Mara, is not a matter of fundamental importance.

What is wrong about helping those who know less than oneself? A case of need comes to one and as like as not the problem presented goes beyond one's understanding in its full ramifications. But since the problem is placed upon our door-step karma is saying "Do something about it". All that is expected or can be expected is that one do his best. Out of the very effort something of wisdom tends to grow. This is part of the meaning of practicing brotherhood. There simply are not enough all-wise Doctors of the "soul".

I know that the picturing of the purification necessary for realization which one finds in much literature is discouraging since it suggests a more than human moral perfection before one

can even begin. But there is something of exaggeration and something of a blind in this. An attitude which is content with nothing less than moral perfection is essential, and this must be implemented by continuous effort to eradicate all faults. But remember that the habit energy of a fault may continue for a time even after its root has been pulled up. Thus the moral perfectioning really applies to the causal level and the results will gradually manifest in the world of effects. The closer one comes to the Source of Light the faster the process and, seeing the precipitate, one may come to have a very poor opinion of himself and may become discouraged. But this is an error for the individual may be near to the critical point and yet fail to make the grade just because of the discouragement. Remember that a house in process of cleaning looks worse than it did before the cleaning started. - Realization is one thing and the cultivation of practical occult power is quite another. Any one may properly aim at Realization and it can be attained without the possession of any occult power in the technical sense. On the whole we should leave the powers along unless they come naturally, in which case it is a matter of karma. The valid development of powers belongs to very special conditions.

I believe that there is real danger when western man tries to follow the special technique of the eastern Yoga Manuals. The individual psychology and the conditions are wrong in the West for this method to be successful, save in exceptional cases. But the West does have its own Ways.

In forming a judgment of what is Theosophy care should be taken to avoid confusing the real thing with what it has become in the several Theosophical societies of today. In the span of less than seventy five years we have seen the same multiplication of sects that beset both Buddhism and Christianity in the past, so that today one has to dig deep to find what real Buddhism and real Christianity are. ~~One~~ Both of the latter cases one may find himself in agreement with the central core and yet unable to agree with most of the sects. Some of the dividing may be a quite valid development of underlying possibilities, while other manifestations are almost certain to be perversions. In any case, the human factor is bound to be faulty. The ^{new} Movement was not designed merely for those who were already saints, but for those who need Light. The important question is, "Is the membership of the group really striving toward the elimination of faults? It is often easy to see faults in others, but can we be so sure that we would do so much better when facing the same problems? I doubt that there are any of us who are free from the need of Charity.

We would be glad to meet you. We will be here until the end of next week and then away until sometime in January. If you wish to come over you had better telephone first to arrange for the time. Phone No. Empire 1-6819. The house No. is 800-8th St.

Yours sincerely,

Franklin Merrell-Wolff

P. O. Box 143
121 N. Brooks Ave.
March 22, 1949
Lycoming 5-1850.

Dear Franklin and Sheriffa,

I feel badly that when I was there last I went off into a corner with the men and that the ladies were not included in the conversation. Jacquie was very angry with me after we left, about this, and she was right.

Sheriffa, please accept my apologies. I was so excited to find two such men to talk to that I behaved badly. I know that there is much I would like to learn from you also. When men get to talking about such things they get concentrated upon a particular approach to the subject and are likely to exclude other and equally valid approaches. I am not a hard-headed agnostic or sceptic or crass unbeliever. When I visit you again I hope that I will be intelligent enough to give equal consideration to your way of approaching spiritual truth.

Jacquie is not at the moment much interested in talk about spiritual things. According to the phase of development she is passing through at present she is interested in the humanistic approach. She is interested in human experience and human suffering. Metaphysical talk sometimes irritates her. However I am sure that fundamentally she believes in invisible worlds and in the possibility of Enlightenment; she just doesn't want to think about such things at present.

I wonder if Sophia's baby has arrived yet? For the life of me I can't at the moment think of her husband's name -- just some kind of momentary block to memory, as I know his name perfectly well. I liked him very much. He not only has a brilliant mind, but human understanding, and a real orientation to spiritual things. I hope we will see them again while they are here and I would like to correspond after they return to Orcas. Sympathetic minds are a rare thing to find.

When I have visited, it bothers me a little that you feed me so well. I am not very much interested in physical food -- only to be sure that I have enough. I come there only for food for the mind and spirit. However, I don't know what to do about it, as mealtimes come. I would gladly bring my own lunch or go downtown to eat, but I guess in practice one can't do it that way.

My thesis project -- "Two Religious Developments of Late Nineteenth Century India Considered in Their Relation to Traditional Indian Thought: Theosophy and Ramakrishna Vedanta" -- is still tied up with official red tape. The dean of the graduate school does not want to use a non-academic advisor. Thus I cannot use Swami Prabhavananda. A professor of the religion department is willing to help but it is felt by others that he alone does not know enough about the subject and that another advisor is needed too. There are also, as one might expect, subtle oppositions to the project ~~fe~~ from various quarters. I mean prejudices on the part of professors.

I want to know something about The Assembly of Man. Do you have anything written which would explain its objects, conditions of membership, etc.?

Franklin, did I mention to you about a man named Svend Raasted who lives in Pasadena (1372 Elizabeth St., Pasadena 6)? His group is called Academy of Equilibrium. I receive mimeographed letters from this group. They are of considerable interest. Mr. Raasted seems to have attained Enlightenment also. You and he differ on some points. He says that there is only one Enlightenment, which is total and all there is. He does not believe in infinities beyond infinities. Another feature of his teaching is that there are no methods which lead to Enlightenment, which only comes when one gives up self-will completely with all reliance on self-devised methods. I loaned him my copy of Pathways. He seemed interested in it but I have not seen him since to get his reactions. I would like to get you and him together to discuss some of these matters, but I doubt if I could arrange it because it may be that one who is enlightened does not have any need of talking to anyone else who is enlightened, since both have total satisfaction within themselves and lack for nothing.

I would appreciate very much having a short letter from you. (Not that I do not want a long one, but I mean I would rather have a short one than none.)

Affectionate greetings to both of you,

your friend,

Harry.

P.O.Box 628,
San Fernando, Calif.,
Mar. 30, 1949

Dear Harry:

You need not feel troubled about the last meeting. Sherifa did not mind our intensive discussion and said she would have liked to listen in more than she did. Also we hope there will be other occasions. Of course, Sherifa represents other sides of the total picture and I am glad that you recognize it. You need not be troubled about the dining here also.

Jacque's interest in human experience and suffering is quite proper, of course. Only, the problem of suffering cannot be solved by disregarding the Transcendental.

Yes, that was truly an unusual meeting. Dr. M. Avramy Melvin is indeed a rare type of man. Incidentally, at last report he is not going back to Orcas but probably will go back to the academic world here in Southern California. I am glad if he stays in this part of the world and I am particularly happy that such a man should help to leaven the academic world.

I do not remember you mentioning Svend Raasted. I know the issue of one Enlightenment vs. continuing Enlightenment is in dispute. Perhaps partly it is a matter of terms, but there is a deeper issue, i.e., is it all simply a matter of return to the Root, as seems to be the view of Aesthetic Mysticism, or is it this plus advance to the Fruit, as seems to fit the demands of the more Rational Mysticism. For several reasons Theosophy would seem to teach the latter view as, for instance, when K.H. speaks of Buddha gaining release from the cycle of birth and death for a Round or two. There is ever something more. My own experience confirms the latter position as I have known altogether four progressive steps, i.e., (a) Realization "I am Atman", (b) "I am Nirvana", (c) the first phase reported in PATHWAYS which was a more complete development of phase (a) and (d) "The High Indifference" which was a progressive culmination of stages at the last of which both the Subject and the Object vanish, and (e) a sort of whisper of still vaster Beyonds which could not correlate with the relative consciousness, at least in so far as it was developed in me, if at all. The strongly one-sided Aesthetic Mysticism is radically anti-rationalistic and would throw the whole conceptual side over-board, while retaining the perceptual. This would make the essential difference between humans and animals of no importance ~~for~~ for Enlightenment. I hold that the human development is essential and that that development must reach an advanced point before Enlightenment in the higher sense is possible.

Looking forward to further meeting, I remain
Yours most sincerely,