

Reflections on *Living with the Himalayan Masters*

Part 1 of 2

Franklin Merrell-Wolff

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But recently the new book *Living with the Himalayan Masters* by Swami Rama was read to me.¹ The acquisition of the material in this book was not only a delightful and informative experience, but at times it was even positively fascinating. Here we learn of men whose existence is largely unknown to the West, and their way of life and the relationships which they maintain, the powers which they manifest, are well-nigh unbelievable. This book is a revelation of a way of life and consciousness and a movement in terms of capacities that is virtually unknown to Western man. The book as a whole is not a philosophic work, but it is rather a story of the actual experience of the author, and I could recommend the reading of this book to all those in our Western world who wish to have a glimpse of a domain that to most is secret and hidden.

In this volume we learn something of the lives, thought, insight, and powers of entities who for the most part are totally unknown to us, though there are four who are known to the world at large and have filled an historic place of outstanding importance. Thus, we know the experience of the author in his contact with four figures that are now pretty well known in the Western world such as Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, and Ramana Maharshi. But beyond this, we learn of figures quite unknown to the external record and to history, and there are many of these—some obvious sages of superior capacity, others, individuals who have won certain *siddhis* of a phenomena sort, and also those who are the counterfeits of the real inner way of life.

And right here I can make an observation of considerable importance. If one goes forth without appropriate guidance to find the bearers of the hidden wisdom, it is far easier for him to find the counterfeits rather than the real sages. One should first be a student of the wisdom that the great have brought forth as is found in the authentic sacred works before he seeks to find the bearers and sources of this wisdom, for it is far easier to find the counterfeit. It is possible by a mere drug to awaken a form of experience quite other than our normal mode of consciousness which may be either intriguing or terrible, but this is not the yogic attainment which the Buddhists tell us normally requires seven incarnations. Here is an error that is made by many. The real thing requires the best effort that man can put forth continued over a long time.

There is a question in my mind as to the wisdom of speaking of phenomenal *siddhis* before an unprepared public. I speak especially in this case of the phenomenal *siddhis*, the performance of acts that seem to violate the laws of physical nature, something which could not be explained by means of the knowledge which physical science has yet been able to achieve. When one hears of such things, what attitude may

¹ Swami Ajaya. ed., *Living with the Himalayan Masters: Spiritual Experiences of Swami Rama* (Honesdale, Pa.: Himalayan International Institute, 1978).

he take? He may doubt it; he may regard it as a fraud. Or he may be credulous, abandon all rational orientation, and become a non-critical believer in the unreasonable and the impossible. He would think then in terms of miracles, performances that are against the laws of nature, and thus arouse a tendency to return to the darkness of superstition.

In 1880, a Western student of the hidden wisdom and powers of Eastern man wrote to an Eastern sage, known to us under the pseudonym of Koot Hoomi, suggesting that if a copy of a London newspaper were delivered in India on the day of publication it would close the mouths of the skeptics concerning the fact of hidden powers. In answer to this, the sage wrote, “Precisely because the test of the London newspaper would close the mouths of the skeptics—it is unthinkable.”² And the writer went on to say that because there would not be any way that the delivery of the newspaper could be explained rationally it would arouse superstition, the belief in miracle, the antagonism of many who were disturbed by this event. It would look like the violation of law or the employment of trickery. The important point is that a power which cannot be explained intelligently is a dangerous thing. We must remember that in 1880, the old physics ruled supreme. The Newtonian conceptions still held, and the facts which led to the new relativity of Einstein had not yet been fully discovered and forcing thereby a new conception. Electronics were not then known. The conception of matter was that it was composed of irreducible chemical elements. The age of subatomic physics had not yet dawned. Transportation was by steam train, or by steamboat, or by animal power, or by one’s own foot. The flying of heavier than air vehicles was not yet discovered. There would have been no way to explain how the newspaper could arrive in India on the day of publication. It would disturb deeply the rational balance of those who became acquainted with this event.

This is an important point and is something to be taken into account in connection with references to or demonstrations of phenomenal *siddhis*. There are other *siddhis* of a non-phenomenal sort which do not bear this disturbing force. We know that the literature does refer to the existence of such phenomenal *siddhis* as well as others. They are implied in the *Bhagavad Gita*. They are specifically referred to in *The Voice of the Silence* with a warning against the cultivation of the lower *siddhis*. And there are many other references in the literature of the East. But these are not to be regarded as miraculous capacities. They are the employment, so we are told, of certain powers in nature, resources in nature, that it is possible for man by the appropriate effort and means to master. They are not a violation of the laws of nature such as a miracle would be, but simply the manifestation of hidden laws in nature; that is, hidden to our ordinary understanding and to the explicitly developed physics and science generally of the West. These powers are represented as not hidden from man arbitrarily, that they are resources which he may unlock by taking the appropriate course, but they imply a conception of nature alien to our present outer understanding. The physics of 1880 would have been totally incapable of any explanation of how this was possible. The physics of today would render much of this more easily understandable. We have today supersonic transport in the form of heavier than air vehicles that would make it much more conceivable today as to how a

² A. T. Barker, ed., *The Mahatma Letters* (Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1923), 52. See the audio recording “On Categorical Teaching and Writing” for a complete quotation of this letter.

newspaper could be delivered in India on the day of its publication in London; therefore, the test would not be a matter of such serious consequence today. But, in general, here we have a principle. Our physics today does not offer us a plausible or reasonable explanation how these phenomenal *siddhis* are possible or even conceivable.

A few years ago sitting in my living room, looking at the surface of an instrument which we call a television set, I saw the image of a man leaving a space capsule on the surface of the moon and heard him utter words that have become historic. I saw him and the image of his companion walk upon the surface, walk in a very peculiar way because of the low gravitation on the surface of the moon. I saw him set up instruments whereby men on earth could observe certain phenomena on the moon. And I took all this in stride. It was no shock. I did not have to invoke the conception of a god or a demon producing miraculous effects, for all this was within the range of our rational comprehension because I had followed the developments in science that have taken place since 1895, the year preceding the discoveries that led to the new physics. But suppose an informed individual of that time who knew the physics of his day were transported by a time capsule, assuming that such could exist, to the present and also saw that event on the surface of the moon, what would be the effect upon him? There would be no philosophic or scientific way in which he could integrate that event in his consciousness. It would very probably have been a shock that might have even unbalanced him.

The point I'm making is that powers that are not within the range of our rational or philosophic understanding if witnessed can have a very adverse effect upon the individual witnessing them. It might break his sanity. It might force him into a superstitious religious interpretation involving the conception of gods or demons, and the effect would not be good. The important point is that when we deal with events that we cannot assimilate into our consciousness in rational terms, we are on dangerous ground.

Today we are familiar with phenomena which could not be understood within the limits of the old physics. Since 1895 there has been an enormous development in physical observations and the development of theory that has opened a new age involving radical changes in our conceptions. Thus, for instance, in the terms of the old physics we had the conception of the conservation of matter and a second conception, namely, that of the conservation of energy, which means that it was conceived that the total matter in the universe remained constant and the total energy in the universe remained constant. But the information which we have derived partly by experiment and partly by theory connected with atomic energy implies that under the appropriate conditions matter can be transformed into energy. This means that the supposed law of the conservation of matter has fallen, and also the supposed law of the conservation of energy, for we find that matter can disappear as matter and reappear in the form of energy. The amount of matter thus being reduced, and the amount of energy increased. The old conceptions have fallen and in its place we have the conception that energy-momentum remains constant. In other words, there is a new entity which, stated roughly, is this: that matter can be transformed into energy—thus reducing the amount of matter and increasing the amount of energy—but one principle remains constant and that is called energy-momentum. Now, as a result of this shift, we are able to produce sensible effects today that would be inconceivable in terms of the old physics, thus appearing to the unsophisticated mind to be like miracles, but we do not so regard them because we have developed a theoretical construction that

is sufficient to comprehend the process within rational terms. The applications of physics today would have seemed like miracles to those who knew only the old physics, but we do not so regard them because we have this theoretical basis for the interpretation of the events.

But this is not sufficient for the rational interpretation of the manifestation of the *siddhis* which are said to be within the range of a human mastery. Our later applications of physical laws involve instrumentation to produce the effects that would have seemed miraculous to one who knew only past physics. In the case of the *siddhis*, no instrumentation is involved and this implies that a further step must be taken in order to embrace within our rational understanding the exercise of these *siddhis*. Sri Aurobindo, somewhere, has made an observation concerning this fact. He noted that Western science had evolved to the point where it could integrate the conceptions of matter and energy, but there remained the further integration of the uniting of these two conceptions with that of consciousness. To integrate the phenomena produced by the exercise of the *siddhis* we would have to see an interrelationship between consciousness and matter and energy, so that they could be comprehended as one integral whole. That step has not yet been taken by our humanity as a whole, by our scientists. The presumption is that it has been taken by the few who are known as the illuminated sages.

In the progressive development of control over the resources of nature, theory and philosophy should proceed along with the unfoldment of phenomena or, if possible, even precede it. The importance of this lies in the fact that through the understanding of the theoretical or philosophical aspect, we prepare the understanding, and then the possible phenomenal effects lose their shocking potential. Philosophy should lead, if anything, phenomena, or the demonstration of the phenomenal, should follow.

Let us consider now the actual phenomenal *siddhis* represented in the book. First, we'll take two that were developed by individuals who were less than sages but who devoted themselves exclusively to the winning of special powers—one was an individual who had gained, after 20 years of effort, the capacity to blow fire from his mouth. This was not a stage trick. It was an actual achievement, as represented in the book, by this individual. He had achieved the capacity to produce fire for himself without the use of matches. Incidentally, a kind of man who might find it difficult to secure a permit to wander around in our national forests. Another instance of this sort was a man of questionable morality who could abstract or withdraw from existing restaurants or stores such things as trays of food or material objects like jewels, to do this at a distance, to transport them unseen through space, so it is said, and have them present before the witness of the event. This was not an act of creating food or creating jewels or other objects, but actually a means of stealing these from their true proprietors. This implies that for the achievement of phenomenal *siddhis*, or at least some of them, an ethical development on the part of the proficient is not necessary, and it opens the door for a very serious kind of criminality. And right here I would like to develop the reason why moral training is required by the true illuminati on the part of candidates for development of inner wisdom and inner power. It is necessary that such candidates should manifest superior moral character, else they are unfit for the exercise of powers that could be even very destructive for mankind. Unfortunately, it is possible by the appropriate effort, so it seems, to develop powers that can be employed in a

mischievous way. This practitioner was no better than a thief. He did not produce the material objects, he abstracted them from their proper owners by a means which our police are totally unable to trace or prevent.

Another event reported in the book seems to have been produced by an authentic sage. In this case, the sage, though in the prime of health, had come to the time when he had decided to leave his body permanently, not by any violent act with respect to the body, but just by leaving it. The book states that the author protested his doing this because the body was a fine physical specimen, but the occupant of the body, the sage, was adamant, had made his decision, and intended to leave the gross physical world to enter upon another way of consciousness. And at the time, before his leaving, he directed the author to move the body to the Ganges and deposit it in it. So when the event took place, and the body ceased to be alive in the physical sense, he and another *sadhaka* tried their best to move the body and could not do so. Then suddenly, it is said, the body rose up into the air, moved over to the Ganges, and dropped in it. Now, we may assume that this body was a gross physical body having actual weight, possibly between 150 or 200 pounds, energy had therefore to be applied in some way so that the body could be moved, but there was no ordinary evidence of a physical means being employed to move the body. It is said that it just rose up into the air and deposited itself in the river. This implies something totally beyond any of our physical conceptions which could be used for an explanation as to how it was possible. Physical effort or energy in some way must have been employed, for movement of weight requires energy. Here again, as in the other cases, there is no way that Western science could explain the operation.

These are a few of the examples given in the book. Now, what attitude can the reader of the book take with respect to these representations? I can list a few of them: one, an attitude of complete skepticism involving the imputation of misrepresentation by the author; second, one might be convinced of the sincerity of the author, but feel that he had been fooled, that he had not employed competent, critical means of observation and that he, thus, thought something had happened which in physical fact had not so happened; third, we have the attitude of those who are especially credulous, who accept readily statements uncritically and tend to become credulous believers abandoning all effort at scientific determination. There are those who might develop a credulous and superstitious religious attitude toward reports of such manifestations. Few there would be, particularly in the West, who could conceive of some rational way of interpreting this manifestation of power. This is the reason why I suggest that references to phenomenal *siddhis* may be a matter that is dangerous in its effect.

Now, the big question before us is, do these powers exist? In *The Mahatma Letters*, in quite rational terms it is affirmed that they do exist, that they are powers in nature, that they are not the miraculous manifestation of gods or demons, but the resources of the appropriate scientific understanding of nature. It is also affirmed that it is the right of man to take of these powers in nature those that he can, that they are not a result of a religious attitude but essentially of a scientific attitude, though a different science from that which is known in the West. Although, no doubt, the position of Western physical science in the twentieth century is closer to the science whereby such powers could be manifested than was the science of the nineteenth century, but still our conceptions of nature are inadequate. Nonetheless, the attitude toward these powers is

scientific and not religious. The question of factuality is naturally one that must be answered by controlled observation in the last analysis, but that controlled observation would require an understanding that goes beyond the resources that we have so far broken out in our Western capacity of understanding.