

# *Theosophy and Buddhism*

SOME ADDITIONAL REFERENCES AND QUOTES TO SUPPLEMENT THE TALK

## **Pre-Vedic Buddhism**

". . . the two main branches of that one mother-trunk, the once universal religion, which antedated the Vedaic ages - we speak of that prehistoric Buddhism which merged later into Brahmanism.

"The religion which the primitive teaching of the early few apostles most resembled - a religion preached by Jesus himself - is the elder of these two, Buddhism. The latter as taught in its primitive purity, and carried to perfection by the last of the Buddhas, Gautama, based its moral ethics on three fundamental principles. It alleged that 1, every thing existing, exists from natural causes; 2, that virtue brings its own reward, and vice and sin their own punishment; and, 3, that the state of man in this world is probationary. We might add that on these three principles rested the universal foundation of every religious creed." (**H.P. Blavatsky, "Isis Unveiled" Vol. 2, p. 123-124**)

". . . our statement that the secret doctrines of the Magi, of the pre-Vedic Buddhists, of the hierophants of the Egyptian Thoth or Hermes, and of the adepts of whatever age and nationality, including the Chaldean kabalists and the Jewish nazars, were *identical* from the beginning. When we use the term *Buddhists*, we do not mean to imply by it either the exoteric Buddhism instituted by the followers of Gautama-Buddha, nor the modern Buddhistic religion, but the secret philosophy of Sakyamuni, which in its essence is certainly identical with the ancient wisdom-religion of the sanctuary, the pre-Vedic Brahmanism."

". . . *Buddhism*, at once the simplest and most satisfying of philosophies, and which resulted in one of the purest religions of the world. . . . By *Buddhism*, therefore, we mean that religion signifying literally the doctrine of wisdom, and which by many ages antedates the metaphysical philosophy of Siddhartha Sakyamuni." (**"Isis Unveiled" Vol. 2, p. 142, 143**)

"We repeat again, *Buddhism is but the primitive source of Brahmanism*. It is not against the primitive *Vedas* that Gautama protests. It is against the sacerdotal and official state religion of his country; and the Brahmans, who in order to make room for and give authority to the castes, at a later period crammed the ancient manuscripts with interpolated slokas, . . . Gautama-Buddha's philosophy was that taught from the beginning of time in the impenetrable secrecy of the inner sanctuaries of the pagodas. We need not be surprised, therefore, to find again, in all the fundamental dogmas of the Gnostics, the metaphysical tenets of both Brahmanism and Buddhism." (**"Isis Unveiled" Vol. 2, p. 169**)

"What has been contemptuously termed Paganism, was ancient wisdom replete with Deity; and Judaism and its offspring, Christianity and Islamism, derived whatever of inspiration they contained from this ethnic parent. Pre-Vedic Brahmanism and Buddhism are the double source from which all religions sprung; Nirvana is the ocean to which all tend." (**"Isis Unveiled" Vol. 2, p. 639**)

"We say it again: archaic Occultism would remain incomprehensible to all, if it were rendered otherwise than through the more familiar channels of Buddhism and Hinduism. For the former is the emanation of the latter; and both are children of one mother – ancient *Lemuro-Atlantean Wisdom*." (**HPB, "The Secret Doctrine" Vol. 1, p. 668**)

"The [Theosophical] Society was formed, then gradually made to merge into and evolve hints of the teachings from the Secret Doctrine of *the oldest school of Occult Philosophy in the whole world* – a school to reform which, finally, the Lord Gautama was made to appear. These teachings could not be given abruptly. They had to be instilled gradually."  
**(Letter from HPB to Col. Olcott, dated 6th December 1887)**

"We know also that Master K.H. informed Mr. Sinnett and others that he was an *esoteric Buddhist*; H.P.B. declared herself a Buddhist; on my asking her in 1875 what could the Masters' belief be called she told me they might be designated "pre-Vedic Budhists," but that no one would now admit there was any Buddhism before the Vedas, so I had best think of them as Esoteric Buddhists." **(William Q. Judge, "A Mahatma's Message to Some Brahmans")**

"He [i.e. the Master K.H.] says the Hindus are getting materialistic - referring to those who take English education - and ends by declaring himself a follower of his Patron Buddha. The *Letter to Some Brahmans*, published in the PATH, enforces the point about Buddhism, and also shows how dense is the surrounding aura of those Brahmans who are strictly orthodox, and how much easier it is for the Adepts to affect the Westerners than the Hindus. And if the wall around the educated Brahman is impenetrable, how much more so is that surrounding the mass of ignorant, superstitious people who take their religion from the Brahman? The spiritual degradation of India to which the Master referred is an indisputable fact. The great majority of Brahmans are theologically and metaphysically as fixed and dogmatic as the Romish Church; they also keep up idol-worship and a great number of degrading caste observances. The poor, uneducated, common people, forming the core of the Hindu population, are gentle, it is true, but they are ignorant and superstitious. Their superstitions are theological; the Brahman fosters this. The other class, consisting of those who take up English, have lost faith and are, as the Master wrote, materialized.

"This is Master's picture. It is also the actual picture. Now where is the wrong in knowing the fact, and in asserting that such an India of today, no matter how glorious it may have been 10,000 years ago, is not the teacher of the West. Rather it is that the West is to lead the reform and raise up the fallen country with all others." **(William Q. Judge, "The Truth about East and West")**

"What have we, the disciples of the true *Arhats*, of esoteric Buddhism and of Sang-gyas [i.e. Buddha] to do with the *Shasters* and Orthodox Brahmanism? There are 100 of thousands of Fakirs, Sannyasis and Saddhus leading the most pure lives, and yet being as they are, on the path of *error*, never having had an opportunity to meet, see or even hear of us. Their forefathers have driven away the followers of the only true philosophy upon earth away from India and now, it is not for the latter to come to them but to them to come to us if they want us. Which of them is ready to become a Buddhist, a *Nastika* as they call us? None. Those who have believed and followed us have had their reward."  
**(Master Morya, the Prayag Letter, referred to above as the "Letter to Some Brahmans")**

**From "The Rise and Progress of Buddhism in Ceylon" published in "The Ceylon Gem" by the Buddhist Publication Society of Ceylon, 1888**

"Since European scholars have begun to study Buddhism, there is a great deal spoken of it, and its secret doctrine, as prevailing among the Lamas of Tibet. There are, it seems, two schools of Buddhist Philosophy there: one devoted to esoteric doctrine, and the other to

the exoteric phase of` Gautama Buddha's Philosophy. Among the first sect, there are said to exist Mahatmas of wonderful psychical powers, similar to those possessed by the Dhyanis and Arhats of old. In Ceylon these adepts counted over thousands in the reign of Dutthagamani. They have gradually ceased to exist, as the keys of those mysteries were lost by the degeneracy of the Buddhist monks of subsequent times, who sought more after worldly renown and glory, than the higher spiritual developments. Any one carefully reading . . . the *Mahavansa*, will not, I trust, fail to observe that distinct and particular reference is made to the Arhats of the different periods.

". . . Since the discovery of the true Law by the most enlightened Gautama, men have become wild and wretched by the awful lusts of the flesh, and have consequently lost the secrets of that Law. But those immortal and divine gems of truth, were not destined to disappear altogether from the habitation of man, as it was decreed by the departing Arhats to be safely and sacredly kept by the Adepts of the trans-Himalayan depths, until man's condition be adapted to receive it. That time is now drawing nigh; and the custodians of the secret doctrine have thought it fit to send Missionaries among mankind to divulge it to them. One of those is Madame Blavatsky, who travelled over to America and converted Colonel Olcott who was then earnestly searching for the truth and investigating the phenomena of Spiritualism. . . . To institute a happy comparison between this conversion . . . and the planting of a branch of the sacred Bo-tree by Sanghamitta, who came over into Ceylon in the reign of Dewanam Piya Tissa, I take the liberty to say that Madame Blavatsky like the princess Sanghamitta carried the secret doctrine to America, and there she implanted it in the mind of Col. Olcott, who received it with as great readiness as the virgin soil of Anuradhapura received the shoot of the Bo-tree. As the sacred Bo-tree was the incentive to the yearly visits of Buddhist pilgrims from the most remote corners of Ceylon, so was the true Law when disclosed to Col. Olcott by Madame Blavatsky the stimulus for him to leave bright prospects and friends behind him in America, and to launch out in a mission round the world to promulgate the true Law to all mankind.

"In the year 1880, Madame Blavatsky and Col. Olcott paid their first visit to Ceylon, and honestly and publicly declared themselves Buddhists, and in furtherance of the dear wish of their heart they established branches of the Theosophical Society in various parts of the Island. By their united endeavours, I must admit that a new impulse has been given to Buddhism; so much so, that the many thousands of natives of the Island, who had hitherto remained ignorant of Buddhism in its pure form, and those who were ashamed to declare themselves Buddhists in public, have all begun to learn, teach and profess Buddhism most openly and vigorously. The most enthusiastic and lavish manner in which the Buddhists of Ceylon celebrated the Wesak days of the past two years, cannot but fail to testify to their honest belief in Buddhism, and to the substantial work done by Madame Blavatsky and Col. Olcott in the cause of Buddhism."

### **To this, HPB responded in "Lucifer" Magazine:**

"This is all correct, and the two above named personages feel proud to see their feeble services so well appreciated and remembered. But they would certainly feel still happier had the actual state of the moral standard in Ceylon - once the pearl of the Indian Ocean - been such as not to have necessitated the letter published in the same paper by a "Chela." This shows the reverse of the medal and mars somewhat the delight of those who have devoted their life to the noble work of spreading the philosophy of the great "Light of Asia." For, it is not the modern temple-Buddhism with all the excrescences that have crept into it, but verily the esoteric Buddhism, of the Lord Gautama, the BUDDHA, that the Founders had in view, when working for the REVIVAL OF BUDDHISM."

## Northern (Mahayana) and Southern (Theravada) Buddhism

"Buddhism is now split into two distinct Churches: the Southern and the Northern Church. The former is said to be the purer form, as having preserved more religiously the original teachings of the Lord Buddha. . . . If the Southern Church is nearer, in that it has not departed, except perhaps in some trifling dogmas due to the many councils held after the death of the MASTER, from the public or exoteric teachings of Sakyamuni - the Northern Church is the outcome of Siddharta Buddha's esoteric teachings which he confined to his elect Bhikshus and Arhats. In fact, Buddhism in the present age, cannot be justly judged either by one or the other of its exoteric popular forms. Real Buddhism can be appreciated only by blending the philosophy of the Southern Church and the metaphysics of the Northern Schools. If one seems too iconoclastic and stern, and the other too metaphysical and transcendental, even to being overgrown with the weeds of Indian exotericism - many of the gods of its Pantheon having been transplanted under new names to Tibetan soil - it is entirely due to the popular expression of Buddhism in both Churches. . . . Both err by an excess of zeal and erroneous interpretations, . . ." **(HPB, "The Theosophical Glossary" p. 67-68, Entry for "Buddhism")**

"The Hindu Reformer [i.e. Buddha] limited his public teachings to the purely moral and physiological aspect of the Wisdom-Religion, to Ethics and MAN alone . . . reserving the hidden Truths for a select circle of his Arhats. The latter received their Initiation at the famous Saptaparna cave . . . near Mount Baibhar (the Webhara of the Pali MSS.). This cave was in Rajagriha, the ancient capital of Mogadha, . . .

"Time and human imagination made short work of the purity and philosophy of these teachings, once that they were transplanted from the secret and sacred circle of the Arhats, during the course of their work of proselytism, into a soil less prepared for metaphysical conceptions than India, i.e., once they were transferred into China, Japan, Siam, and Burmah. How the pristine purity of these grand revelations was dealt with may be seen in studying some of the so-called "esoteric" Buddhist schools of antiquity in their modern garb, not only in China and other Buddhist countries in general, but even in not a few schools in Thibet, left to the care of uninitiated Lamas and Mongolian innovators." **(HPB, "The Secret Doctrine" Vol. 1, Introductory, p. xx-xxi)**

"If the field of exoteric and official Buddhism of the Churches of both North and South, those of Tibet and Ceylon, is covered once more with parasitic weeds, it is precisely the Theosophists who are helping the high priest Sumangala to extirpate them. . . . He has charge of the nine or ten "Branches of The Theosophical Society" in Ceylon, which with the help of *theosophical missionaries* become from year to year more and more free of the superstitions grafted on pure Buddhism during the reign of Tamil kings." **(HPB, "Misconceptions")**

"Since the reform produced by Tsong-ka-pa, many abuses have again crept into the *theocracy* of the land [i.e. Tibet]." **(The Theosophical Glossary" p. 185, Entry for "Lama")**

## The Theosophical Movement and Buddhism

"The T.S. was not created to propagate any dogma of any exoteric ritualistic church, whether Buddhist, Brahmanical, or Christian. . . . The said Editor [i.e. HPB] is undeniably a Buddhist - i.e., a follower of the esoteric school of the great "Light of Asia," and so is the President of the Theosophical Society, Colonel H. S. Olcott. But this does not pin the

theosophical body as a whole to ecclesiastical Buddhism. The Society was founded to become the Brotherhood of Humanity - a centre, philosophical and religious, common to all - not as a propaganda for Buddhism merely.

". . . It has a Buddhist colouring simply because that religion, or rather philosophy, approaches more nearly to the TRUTH (the secret wisdom) than does any other exoteric form of belief. Hence the close connexion between the two. . . yet the Buddhism of today is none the less a rather dogmatic religion, split into many and heterogeneous sects. We follow the Buddha alone. . . the T.S. does not raise the standard of exoteric Buddhism and proclaim itself a follower of the Church of the Lord Buddha. It desires too sincerely to remain with that *unadulterated* "light" to allow itself to be absorbed by its distorted shadow.

". . . It is true that no mysteries or esotericism exists in the two chief Buddhist Churches, the Southern and the Northern. Buddhists may well be content with the dead letter of Siddhartha Buddha's teachings, as fortunately no higher or nobler ones in their effects upon the ethics of the masses exist, to this day. . . There is an esoteric doctrine, a soul-ennobling philosophy, behind the outward body of ecclesiastical Buddhism. . . This secret system was taught to the *Arhats* alone, generally in the Saptaparna (Mahavansa's *Sattapani*) cave, . . . by the Lord Buddha himself, between the hours of *Dhyana* (or mystic contemplation). It is from this cave - . . . that the Arhats initiated into the Secret Wisdom carried away their learning and knowledge beyond the Himalayan range, wherein the Secret Doctrine is taught to this day.

". . . TRUTH is not Buddhism, but esoteric BUDHISM. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. . ." (**HPB, "The Theosophical Society: Its Mission and Its Future"**)

### **The Three Jewels - "I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha"**

"Tiratna, or *Ratnatraya* . . . The Three Jewels, the technical term for the well-known formula "Buddha, Dharma and Sangha" (or Samgha), the two latter terms meaning, in modern interpretation, "religious law" (Dharma), and the "priesthood" (Sangha). Esoteric Philosophy, however, would regard this as a very loose rendering. The words "Buddha, Dharma and Sangha", ought to be pronounced as in the days of Gautama, the Lord Buddha, namely "Bodhi, Dharma and Sangha"; and interpreted to mean "Wisdom, its laws and priests", the latter in the sense of "spiritual exponents", or adepts."

"In Northern Buddhism and its secret schools, the Buddha, his sacred teachings, and the Narjols (Buddhas of Compassion)." (**"The Theosophical Glossary" p. 341, Entry for "Tiratna"; p. 127, Entry for "Gems, Three Precious"**)

### **From the Bodhicharyavatara, "The Way of the Bodhisattva" or "Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life" by the 8th century Indian Buddhist Master Shantideva**

"For all those ailing in the world, until their every sickness has been healed, may I myself become for them the doctor, nurse, the medicine itself."

"And now as long as space endures, as long as there are beings to be found, may I continue likewise to remain to drive away the sorrows of the world."

"Directly, then, or indirectly, do nothing that is not for others' sake. And solely for their welfare dedicate your every action to the gaining of enlightenment."

"They indeed, possessed of many wants, will suffer many troubles, all for very little."

"Perceiving now the faults possessed by "I", the ocean of good qualities that are in "other," I shall lay aside all love of self and gain the habit of adopting other beings."

"All the joy the world contains has come through wishing happiness for others. All the misery the world contains has come through wanting pleasure for oneself."

## **From the Ratnagotravibhaga (Uttara Tantra) by Aryasangha, said to have been inspired or even transmitted by the Bodhisattva Maitreya**

"By realizing the absence of defects and the presence of qualities, and through love, seeing the equality of oneself and all beings, Buddhahood will be quickly attained."

"The Nirmanakaya persuades the worldly beings to enter the path towards peace. He fully matures them and, granting prophecy, becomes the cause of their release. These form kayas remain forever in this world like the realm of form within the realm of space."

"Having realized THATNESS, the nature of the Dharmadhatu, just as it is, those of understanding are released from birth, sickness, aging, and death. Though free from the destitution of birth and so on, they demonstrate these, since by their insight they have given rise to compassion for beings. . . . Since they have seen Reality as it is, they are beyond being born and so on. Yet, as the embodiment of compassion itself they display birth, illness, old age, and death."

"Though they are beyond all worldly matters, these Bodhisattvas do not leave the world. They act for the sake of all worldly beings within the world, unblemished by its defects. As a lotus will grow in the midst of water, not being polluted by the water's faults, these Noble Ones are born in the world unpolluted by any worldly phenomena. Viewing the accomplishment of their task, their understanding always blazes like fire. And they always rest evenly balanced in meditative stability, which is peace."

"The final truth is in every respect devoid of anything compounded."

"Seeing within all beings the precious perfect Buddha that has fallen into the great filth of the mental poisons, the Victorious One . . . teaches the Dharma to persuade them to purify it."

"This Tathagatagarbha abides within the shroud of the afflictions. . . . This Buddha Element abides within all sentient beings, obscured by the defilement of the adventitious poisons."

"It [i.e. the Tathagatagarbha, Buddha Nature] is not born, and it does not die. It suffers no harm and does not age since it is permanent and steadfast, the state of peace and immutability. . . . is unchangingness itself and thus has the attribute of permanence. Equalling the uttermost end it is refuge itself and thus holds the attribute of steadfastness. Since absence of thought is its nature, it is Dharmata free from duality and thus has the attribute of peace. Hosting uncreated qualities, it is immutability itself and thus possesses the attribute of indestructibility. Why is it the Dharmakaya, the Tathagata, the Noble Truth, and the Absolute Nirvana? Its qualities are inseparable, like the sun and its rays. Thus other than Buddhahood there is no Nirvana."

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