

Budhism and Buddhism

**On A.P. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*, 1883
An excellent work with a very unfortunate title**



Train of Thoughts

Esoteric Buddhism or Inner Wisdom (Sophia in Greek) is a pre-Vedic term millennia older than 643 BCE, the year Siddhārtha Gautama, Prince of Kapilavastu, was born. It has nothing to do with the Buddhist religion whatsoever. 3

A puzzle in *Esoteric Buddhism*

***Esoteric Buddhism* was an excellent work with a very unfortunate title**

Buddhism, the religious system of ethics preached by Lord Gautama and named after his title of Buddha, the “Enlightened,” and Budha or Inner Wisdom are totally different. 6

Though *Esoteric Buddhism* preceded *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, its contents are not original. 6

Long kalpas had passed before the epithet of Buddha became so humanised, as to allow the term to be applied to mortals and finally to Lord Gautama. 6

Bodha, Bodhi, Buddha, Buddhi, are one and the same, Divine Wisdom. 7

Budhism is Archaic Wisdom-Religion. It reconciles all religions, strips every one of its outward, human garments, and shows the root of each to be identical with that of every other great religion. It proves the necessity of an immutable Divine Principle in nature but rejects the gods of monotheistic religions, sorry caricatures created by man in his own image and likeness. Truth is its god and dogma. 7

Orthodox, exoteric Buddhism, or the public teachings of Gautama Buddha, differ greatly from the Secret Doctrine, or esoteric Buddhism, that he had reserved for the initiated Brahmans of his day and his Arhats. 8

Esoteric Buddhism* and *The Secret Doctrine

Our closing remark 13

Theosophy is not Buddhism, exoteric or esoteric

Bodhi and Sophia are one and the same, supersensuous wisdom from within



Excerpts and articles have been arranged chronologically. — ED. PHIL.

Esoteric Budhism or Inner Wisdom (Sophia in Greek) is a pre-Vedic term millennia older than 643 BCE, the year Siddhārtha Gautama, Prince of Kapilavastu, was born. It has nothing to do with the Buddhist religion whatsoever.

None of the great religions, neither the Ethiopian nor any other, has preceded the religion of the first Vedists: ancient “Budhism.” Let us explain. When one speaks of esoteric Budhism (with one *d*) to the European public — so ignorant of oriental matters — it is mistaken for Buddhism, the religion of Gautama the Buddha. “Buddha” is a title of the sages and means the “illuminated one”; Budhism comes from the word “Budha” (wisdom, intelligence) personified in the *Purānas*. He is the son of Soma (the moon in its masculine aspect or Lunus) and Tārā, the unfaithful wife of Brihaspati (the planet Jupiter), the personification of ceremonial cult, of sacrifice and other exoteric mummeries. Tārā is the soul which aspires to truth, turns away in horror from human dogma which claims to be divine, and rushes into the arms of *Soma*, god of mystery, of occult nature, whence is born Budha (the veiled but brilliant son), the personification of *secret wisdom*, of the Esotericism of the occult sciences. This Budha is by thousands of years older than the year 600 (or 300 according to certain Orientalists) before the Christian era, date assigned to the appearance of Gautama the Buddha, prince of Kapilavastu. Budhist esotericism has therefore nothing to do with the Buddhist religion, and the good and revered Sumangala has nothing to do with Theosophy in India. 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. The saintly old Sumangala labours but to bring back to its pristine purity the religion preached by his great master — religion which disdains tinsel and idols and strives to re-become that philosophy whose sublime ethic eclipses that of all other beliefs the world over. (*Vide* Barthélemy Sain-Hilaire, Professor Max Müller, etc., on this subject.)¹

¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (MISCONCEPTIONS – G) VIII, pp. 75-76

A puzzle in *Esoteric Buddhism*

Editors reply to "An Agnostic Student of Theosophy" from Aberdeen. First published in *Lucifer*, Vol. II, No. 9, May 1888, pp. 254-60. Full text in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, IX pp. 280-85.

EDITOR'S NOTE — The above letter is an arraignment either of the Esoteric Doctrine or of its expounders. Now the doctrine itself is unassailable, though its expounders may often make mistakes in their presentation of it; particularly when, as in the case of the author of *Esoteric Buddhism*, the writer was only very partially informed upon the subjects he treats of.

Leaving the author of *Esoteric Buddhism* to answer the criticism for himself, one of the editors of *Lucifer*, as a person indirectly concerned with the production of the said work, begs the privilege of saying a few words upon the subject. It was as a special favour to herself that the teachings contained in Mr. Sinnett's volume were first begun; she was the only one of the party concerned with these studies who had received for a series of years instruction in them. Therefore no one can know better than herself what was, or was not, meant in such or another tenet of this particular doctrine.

Our correspondent should bear in mind therefore, that:

- (a) At the time of the publication of *Esoteric Buddhism* (*Budhism*² would be more correct) the available Occult data were comparatively scanty in its author's hands. Otherwise, he would not have seemed to derive man from the ape — a theory absurd and *impossible* in the sight of the MASTERS.
- (b) Only a tentative effort was being cautiously made to test the readiness of the public to assimilate the elements of Esoteric philosophy.

For Mr. Sinnett was left largely to his own resources and speculations and very naturally followed the bend of his own mind, which, though greatly favouring esoteric philosophy, was, nevertheless, decidedly biassed by modern science. Consequently, the revelations then broached were purposely designed to rather afford a bird's-eye view of the doctrine than to render a detailed treatment of any special problem possible. The teachings were not given at first with the object of publication. No regular systematic teaching was ever contemplated, nor could it be so given to a layman; therefore that teaching consisted of detached bits of information in the shape of answers in private letters to questions offered upon most varied subjects, on Cosmogony and Psychology, Theogony and Anthropology, and so on. Moreover, more queries were left without any reply and full explanation refused — as the latter belong to the mysteries of Eastern Initiation — than there were problems solved. This has, subsequently, proved a very wise policy. It is not at this stage of absolute materialism on the one hand, of cautious agnosticism on the other, and of fluctuating uncertainty as regards almost every individual speculation among the most eminent men of Science, that

² *Budhism* would mean "Wisdom," from *Budha*, "a sage," "a wise man," and the imperative verb "*Budhyadh-wam*," "Know"; and *Buddhism* is the religious philosophy of Gautama, the Buddha. As Dr. H.H. Wilson very truly remarks in his translation of *Vishnu-Purāna*, "Much erroneous speculation has originated in confounding Budha, the son of Soma (the Moon) and the regent of the planet Mercury — 'he who knows' 'the intelligent,' — with Buddha, any deified [?] mortal, or 'he by whom truth is known,' or as individually applicable, Gautama or Śākya, Son of the Raja Śuddhodana. The two characters have nothing in common; and the names are identical, only when one or other is misspelt." "Budhism" has preceded *Buddhism* by long ages and is pre-Vedic.

the full revelation of the archaic scheme of anthropology would be advisable. In the days of Pythagoras the heliocentric system was a mystery taught only in the silence and secrecy of the inner Temples; and Socrates was put to death for divulging it, under the inspiration of his DAIMON. Now-a-days, the revealers of systems which clash with religion or science are not put to physical death, but they are slowly tortured to their dying hour with open calumny and secret persecutions, when ridicule proves to be of no avail. Thus, a full statement of even an abridged and hardly defined “Esoteric Buddhism” would do more harm than good. Only *certain portions* of it can be given, and they will be given very soon.

Nevertheless, as our critic readily admits, all these difficulties notwithstanding, Mr. Sinnett has produced a most interesting and valuable work. That, in his too exaggerated respect and admiration for modern science, he seems to have somewhat materialized the teachings is what every metaphysician will admit. But it is also true, that the writer of *Esoteric Buddhism* would be the last man to claim any more “*authoritative* character” for his book, than what is given to it by the few verbatim quotations from the teachings of a Master, more particularly when treating of such moot questions as that of Evolution. The point on which his critic lays such stress — the incompatibility of the statements made in his work as to the origin of Man on this planet — certainly invalidates Mr. Sinnett’s attempted reconciliation (if it is such) of the Darwinian and Esoteric Schemes of human evolution. But at this every true Theosophist, who expects no recognition of the truths he believes in at present, but feels sure of their subsequent triumph at a future day, can only rejoice. Scientific theories or rather *conjectures* are really too materialistic to be reconciled with “*Esoteric Buddhism*.”

As the whole problem, however, is one of great complexity it would be out of the question to do any justice to it in the space of a brief note. The “Buddhism” of the archaic, *prehistoric* ages is not a subject that can be disposed of in a single little volume. Suffice it to say that the larger portion of the coming *Secret Doctrine* is devoted to the elucidation of the true esoteric views as to Man’s origin and social development — hardly mentioned in *Esoteric Buddhism*. And to this source we must be permitted to refer the inquirer.³

***Esoteric Buddhism* was an excellent work with a very unfortunate title**

Esoteric Buddhism was an excellent work with a very unfortunate title, though it meant no more than does the title of this work, THE SECRET DOCTRINE. It proved unfortunate, because people are always in the habit of judging things by their appearance, rather than their meaning; and because the error has now become so universal, that even most of the Fellows of the Theosophical Society have fallen victims to the same misconception. From the first, however, protests were raised by Brahmans and others against the title; and, in justice to myself, I must add that *Esoteric Bud-*

³ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (A PUZZLE IN ESOTERIC BUDDHISM) IX pp. 282-85

dhism was presented to me as a completed volume, and that I was entirely unaware of the manner in which the author intended to spell the word “Budh-ism.”

Buddhism, the religious system of ethics preached by Lord Gautama and named after his title of Buddha, the “Enlightened,” and Budha or Inner Wisdom are totally different.

This has to be laid directly at the door of those who, having been the first to bring the subject under public notice, neglected to point out the difference between “Budhism” — the religious system of ethics preached by the Lord Gautama, and named after his title of Buddha, “the Enlightened” — and *Budha*, “Wisdom,” or knowledge (*Vidyā*), the faculty of cognizing, from the Sanskrit root “Budh,” *to know*. We theosophists of India are ourselves the real culprits, although, at the time, we did our best to correct the mistake.⁴ To avoid this deplorable misnomer was easy; the spelling of the word had only to be altered, and by common consent both pronounced and written “Budhism,” instead of “Buddhism.” Nor is the latter term correctly spelt and pronounced, as it ought to be called, in English, Buddhaism, and its votaries “Budhaists.”

Though *Esoteric Buddhism* preceded *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, its contents are not original.

This explanation is absolutely necessary at the beginning of a work like this one. The “Wisdom religion” is the inheritance of all the nations, the world over, though the statement was made in *Esoteric Buddhism*⁵ that “two years ago, neither I *nor any other European living* knew the alphabet of the science here for the first time put into a scientific shape,” etc. This error must have crept in through inadvertence. For the present writer knew all that which is “divulged” in *Esoteric Buddhism* — and much more — *many years* before it became her duty (in 1880) to impart a small portion of the Secret Doctrine to two *European* gentlemen, one of whom was the author of *Esoteric Buddhism*; and surely the present writer has the undoubted, though to her, rather equivocal, privilege of being a European, by birth and education. Moreover, a considerable part of the philosophy expounded by Mr. Sinnett was taught in America, even before *Isis Unveiled* was published, to two Europeans and to my colleague, Colonel H.S. Olcott. Of the three teachers the latter gentleman has had, the first was a Hungarian Initiate, the second an Egyptian, the third a Hindu. As permitted, Colonel Olcott has given out some of this teaching in various ways; if the other two have not, it has been simply because they were not allowed: their time for public work having not yet come. But for others it has, and the appearance of Mr. Sinnett’s several interesting books is a visible proof of the fact. It is above everything important to keep in mind that no theosophical book acquires the least additional value from pretended authority.

Long kalpas had passed before the epithet of Buddha became so humanised, as to allow the term to be applied to mortals and finally to Lord Gautama.

In etymology *Ādi*, and *Adhi-Budha*, the *one* (or the First) and “Supreme Wisdom” is a term used by Āryāsanga in his Secret treatises, and now by all the mystic Northern

⁴ See *The Theosophist*, Vol. V, June 1883, p. 225; [Notes by Dāmodar K. Māvalankar and T. Subba Row.]

⁵ Preface to the original edition.

Buddhists. It is a Sanskrit term, and an appellation given by the earliest Āryans to the Unknown deity; the word “Brahmā” not being found in the *Vedas* and the early works. It means the absolute Wisdom, and “Ādi-bhūta” is translated “the primeval uncreated cause of all worlds”⁶ Æōns of untold duration must have elapsed, before the epithet of Buddha was so humanized, so to speak, as to allow of the term being applied to mortals and finally appropriated to one whose unparalleled virtues and knowledge caused him to receive the title of the “Buddha of Wisdom unmoved.”

Bodha, Bodhi, Buddha, Buddhi, are one and the same, Divine Wisdom.

- *Bodha* means the innate possession of divine intellect or “understanding”;
- “Buddha,” the acquirement of it by personal efforts and merit; while
- *Buddhi* is the faculty of cognizing the channel through which divine knowledge reaches the “Ego,” the discernment of good and evil; “divine conscience” also; and “Spiritual Soul,” which is the vehicle of *Ātman*.

“When *Buddhi* absorbs our EGO-tism (destroys it) with all its *Vikāras*, Avalokiteśvara becomes manifested to us, and Nirvāna, or *Mukti*, is reached,” “*Mukti*” being the same as Nirvāna, *i.e.*, freedom from the trammels of “*Māyā*” or *illusion*. “*Bodhi*” is likewise the name of a particular state of trance condition, called *Samādhi*, during which the subject reaches the culmination of spiritual knowledge.

Buddhism is Archaic Wisdom-Religion. It reconciles all religions, strips every one of its outward, human garments, and shows the root of each to be identical with that of every other great religion. It proves the necessity of an immutable Divine Principle in nature but rejects the gods of monotheistic religions, sorry caricatures created by man in his own image and likeness. Truth is its god and dogma.

Unwise are those who, in their blind and, in our age, untimely hatred of Buddhism, and, by reaction, of “Budhism,” deny its esoteric teachings (which are those also of the Brahmans), simply because the name suggests what to them, as Monotheists, are noxious doctrines. *Unwise* is the correct term to use in their case. For the Esoteric philosophy is alone calculated to withstand, in this age of crass and illogical materialism, the repeated attacks on all and everything man holds most dear and sacred, in his inner spiritual life.⁷ The true philosopher, the student of the Esoteric Wisdom, entirely loses sight of personalities, dogmatic beliefs and special religions. Moreover, Esoteric philosophy reconciles all religions, strips every one of its outward, human garments, and shows the root of each to be identical with that of every other great religion. It proves the necessity of an absolute Divine Principle in nature. It denies Deity no more than it does the Sun. Esoteric philosophy has never rejected God in Nature, nor Deity as the absolute and abstract *Ens*. It only refuses to accept any of the gods of the so-called monotheistic religions, gods created by man in his own image and likeness, a blasphemous and sorry caricature of the Ever Unknowable. Furthermore, the records we mean to place before the reader embrace the esoteric tenets of the whole world since the beginning of our humanity, and Buddhistic occultism

⁶ *Vishnu-Purāna*, Bk. IV, ch. i; *tr.* of H.H. Wilson, Vol. III, p. 230

⁷ [Cf. “. . . it is not the modern temple-Buddhism with all the excrescences that have crept into it, but verily the esoteric *Budhism*, of the Lord Gautama, the BUDDHA, that the Founders had in view, when working for the REVIVAL OF BUDDHISM.” *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (LITERARY JOTTINGS) X p. 238; On those who have devoted their life to the noble work of spreading the philosophy of the great “Light of Asia” in Ceylon.]

occupies therein only its legitimate place, and no more. Indeed, the secret portions of the “*Dan*” or “*Janna*” (“*Dhyāna*”)⁸ of Gautama’s metaphysics — grand as they appear to one unacquainted with the tenets of the Wisdom-Religion of antiquity — are but a very small portion of the whole. The Hindu Reformer limited his public teachings to the purely moral and physiological aspect of the Wisdom-Religion, to Ethics and MAN alone. Things “unseen and incorporeal,” the mystery of Being outside our terrestrial sphere, the great Teacher left entirely untouched in his public lectures, reserving the hidden Truths for a select circle of his Arhats. The latter received their Initiation at the famous Saptaparna cave (the *Sattapanni* of *Mahāvanśa*) near Mount Baibhār (the Webhāra of the Pāli MSS.). This cave was in Rājagriha,⁹ the ancient capital of Magadha, and was the *Cheta* cave of Fa-hien, as rightly suspected by some archæologists.¹⁰

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.

Orthodox, exoteric Buddhism, or the public teachings of Gautama Buddha, differ greatly from the Secret Doctrine, or esoteric Buddhism, that he had reserved for the initiated Brahmans of his day and his Arhats.

Thus the reader is asked to bear in mind the very important difference between *orthodox* Buddhism — *i.e.*, the public teachings of Gautama the Buddha, and his esoteric *Budhism*. His Secret Doctrine, however, differed in no wise from that of the initiated Brahmans of his day. The Buddha was a child of the Āryan soil, a born Hindu, a Kshatriya and a disciple of the “twice born” (the initiated Brahmans) or Dvijas. His teachings, therefore, could not be different from their doctrines, for the whole Buddhist reform merely consisted in giving out a portion of that which had been kept secret from every man outside of the “enchanted” circle of Temple-Initiates and ascetics. Unable to teach *all* that had been imparted to him — owing to his pledges — though he taught a philosophy built upon the groundwork of the true esoteric knowledge, the Buddha gave to the world only its *outward* material body and kept its *soul* for his Elect. (See also Volume II.) Many Chinese scholars among Orientalists have

⁸ *Dan*, now become in modern Chinese and Tibetan phonetics *ch’an*, is the general term for the esoteric schools, and their literature. In the old books, the word *Janna* is defined as “to reform one’s self by meditation and knowledge,” a second *inner* birth. Hence *Dzan*, *Djan* phonetically, the “Book of *Dzyan*.” [Cf. J. Edkins, *Chinese Buddhism*, 1880, p. 129, note.]

⁹ [Origin of Ancient Greeks or Graihakas, Macedonian Lords Paramount and Indian Emperors, who had emigrated from India to Greece. See “Graikos, Hellene, Hellas” in the same series.]

¹⁰ Mr. Beglar, the chief engineer at Buddha-Gayā, and a distinguished archæologist, was the first, we believe, to discover it.

heard of the “Soul Doctrine.” None seem to have understood its real meaning and importance.¹¹

Theosophists are fully aware that Mr. Rhys Davids . . . said that the theories propounded by the author of *Esoteric Buddhism* “were not Buddhism, and were not Esoteric.” The remark is the result of

(a) the unfortunate mistake of writing “Buddhism” instead of “Budhaism,” or *Budhism*, *i.e.*, of connecting the system with Gautama’s religion instead of with the Secret Wisdom taught by Krishna, Śankarāchārya, and by many others, as much as by Buddha; and

(b) of the impossibility of Mr. Rhys Davids knowing anything of true esoteric teachings.

But he is, at all events, the greatest Pāli and Buddhist scholar of the day, and whatever he may say is entitled to respectful hearing. But when one who knows no more of exoteric Buddhism on scientific and materialistic lines, than he knows of esoteric philosophy, defames those whom he honours with his spite, and assumes with the Theosophists the airs of a profound scholar, one can only smile and — heartily laugh at him.¹²

Esoteric Buddhism and The Secret Doctrine

First Published in *Lucifer*, Vol. III, No. 15, November 1888, pp. 247-54.
Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, X pp. 177-88.

From A.P. Sinnett to the Editor of *Lucifer*, H.P. Blavatsky.
The footnotes signed “Ed.” are by H.P. Blavatsky. — Boris de Zirkoff

In reference to various remarks concerning *Esoteric Buddhism* which appear in the course of your new work, *The Secret Doctrine*, I beg to call your attention to some passages on the same subject which appeared on former occasions in *The Theosophist* at a time when that magazine was edited by yourself.

In *The Secret Doctrine* you speak of *Esoteric Buddhism* as a work with “a very unfortunate title,” and in reference to a passage in my preface, emphasising the novelty for European readers of the teachings then given out, you say the error must have crept in through inadvertence. In the last number of *Lucifer* you discuss the same point in a note appended to a correspondent’s letter. Permit me to remind you of an editorial note, evidently from your own pen, in the February *Theosophist*, 1884. This is in reply to an objection raised by Mr. W.Q. Judge that nearly all the leading ideas of the doctrine embodied in *Esoteric Buddhism* are to be found in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. You wrote:

“We do not believe our American brother is justified in his remarks. The knowledge given out in *Esoteric Buddhism* is, most decidedly, ‘given out for the first time,’ inasmuch as the allegories that lie scattered in the Hindu sacred literature *are now for the first time clearly explained* to the world of the profane.¹³ Since the birth of the Theosophical Society and the publication of *Isis*, it is being repeated daily that all the Esoteric Wisdom of the ages lies concealed in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad-Gita*. Yet, unto the day of the first appearance of *Esoteric Buddhism*, and for long centuries

¹¹ *Secret Doctrine*, I pp. xvii-xxi; [Introductory]

¹² *Ibid.*, I p. 539 fn.

¹³ The author of *The Secret Doctrine* begs to suggest that she never denied to the doctrines expounded by Mr. Sinnett the privilege of having been *clearly* “EXPLAINED,” for the first time, in *print*, in *Esot. Buddhism*. All she asserts is, that *it is not for the first time* that they were *given out to a European*, and by the latter to other Europeans. Between “publishing” and “giving out” there is a decided difference; an admirable *peg*, at any rate, for our common enemies to hang their captious cavils upon. It is not the writer of *The Secret Doctrine*, moreover, who was the first to put such a natural interpretation upon the sentence used by our esteemed friend and correspondent, but, verily, sundry critics *outside* of, as also *within* the Theosophical Society. It is no personal question between Mr. Sinnett and H.P. Blavatsky, but between these two individuals on the one hand and their critics on the other; the former being both in duty bound — as theosophists and believers in the esoteric teaching — to defend the Sacred Doctrine from side attacks — *via* its expounders. — Ed.]

back, these doctrines remained a sealed letter *to all but a few initiated Brahmans* who had always kept the spirit of it to themselves.”

Thus, if I erred in my statement about the doctrine having been unknown previously to Europeans, I erred in very good company — your own. Your note goes on to say that certainly the teachings of *Esoteric Buddhism* lie concealed in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, you say:

“But what of that? Of what good to W.Q. Judge or any other is the diamond that lies concealed deep underground? Of course everyone knows that there is not a gem now sparkling in a jeweller’s shop but pre-existed and lay concealed since its formation for ages within the bowels of the earth. Yet, surely, he who got it first from its finder and cut and polished it, may be permitted to say that this particular diamond is ‘given out for the first time’ to the world. . . .”¹⁴

In regard to my “unfortunate title,” which was (as you know, I think) approved when first proposed without any question arising as to the two “d’s” — you say in *The Secret Doctrine*:

“It has enabled our enemies to find an effective weapon against theosophy; because, as an eminent Pali scholar very pointedly expressed it, there was in the volume named “neither esotericism nor Buddhism.”¹⁵

It happens that you discussed the same criticism in an article in *The Theosophist* for November, 1883. Your text on that occasion was an article in the *St. James’ Gazette*, which you attributed to Dr. Rhys-Davids, and you wrote:

“But before the Orientalists are able to prove that the doctrines as taught in Mr. Sinnett’s exposition are ‘not Buddhism, esoteric or exoteric,’ they will have to make away with the thousands of Brāhmanical Adwaitee and other Vedāntin writings — the works of Śankarāchārya in particular, — from which it can be proved that precisely the same doctrines are taught in those works, esoterically.”¹⁶

You spoke, in the course of the article, of the very remark you now find to be “very pointed,”¹⁷ as “such a spiteful and profitless criticism” to attribute it to the pen of the great Pali scholar.

The propriety of the title given to my book was discussed in an article in *The Theosophist* for June, 1884, when an editorial note was appended, in the course of which the writer said:

“The name given to Mr. Sinnett’s book will not be misleading or objectionable when the close identity between the doctrines therein expounded and those of the ancient Rishis of India is clearly perceived.”¹⁸

These extracts seem to show that the unfavourable view of *Esoteric Buddhism* now presented to the readers of *The Secret Doctrine* can only have been developed in your mind within a comparatively recent period.¹⁹ Satisfied with the assurance conveyed to me — as explained in the preface to the sixth edition

¹⁴ This proves, firstly, that the desire to defend, in print, a friend and co-worker *quand même*, even when he is not entirely right, is always injudicious; and secondly, that experience comes with age. “The good advocate not only hears, but examines his case, and pincheth the cause where he fears it is founded” — Fuller teaches. We proved no “good advocate,” and now bear our *Karma* for it; from an “advocate” we have become a “defendant.” — [Ed.]

¹⁵ [Vol. I, p. xvii]

¹⁶ [Collected Writings, Vol. V, p. 344]

¹⁷ So we say now. Not a word of what we wrote *then* do we repudiate here; and *The Secret Doctrine* proves it. But this does not clash at all with the fact that, once made public, no doctrine can be referred to any longer as “esoteric.” The esoteric tenets revealed — both in *Esoteric Buddhism* and *The Secret Doctrine* have become *exoteric* now. Nor does a remark cease to be “spiteful” for being “very pointed,” *e.g.*, most of Carlyle’s remarks. A few years ago, at a time when our doctrines were hardly delineated and the Orientalists knew nothing of them, any such premature discussion and criticism were “profitless.” But now, when these doctrines have spread throughout the whole world, unless we call things by their true names, and admit our mistakes (for it was one, to spell “Buddhism,” *Buddhism* — a mistake, moreover, distinctly attributed to *ourselves*, “theosophists of India,” *vide* page xviii, Vol. I of *The Secret Doctrine*, and *not at all* to Mr. Sinnett), our critics will have an undeniable right to charge us with sailing under *false* colours. Nothing more fatal to our cause could ever happen. If we would be regarded as *theosophists*, we have to protect THEOSOPHY; we have to defend our colours before we think of defending our own petty personality and *amour propre*, and should be ever ready to sacrifice ourselves. And this is what we have tried to do in the *Introduction to The Secret Doctrine*. Poor is that standard-bearer who shields his body from the bullets of the enemy with the sacred banner entrusted to him! — [Ed.]

¹⁸ The Rishis having nought to do with “Buddhism,” the religion of Gautama Buddha, this question shows plainly that the mistake involved in the double “d” had not yet struck the writer as forcibly as it has done later. — [Ed.]

[The quoted passage is from an editorial note signed T.S. which was appended to an article entitled “Esoteric Buddhism and Hinduism,” signed by “A Brahman Theosophist” (*The Theosophist*, Vol. V, June, 1884, pp. 223-25). The initials T.S. were evidently used by T. Subba Row, and the editorial note referred to is included in the collection known as the *Esoteric Writings of T. Subba Row* (2nd ed., 1931). — Boris de Zirkoff]

¹⁹ This is an error. What we say now in *The Secret Doctrine* is what we *knew*, but kept silent upon ever since the *first year* of the publication of *Esoteric Buddhism*; though we confess we have not realised the importance of the mistake as fully from the beginning as we do now. It is the number of criticisms received in private letters

— by the reverend teacher from whom its substance was derived — that the book was a sound and trustworthy presentation of his teachings as a whole, that would never have to be remodelled or apologised for,²⁰ I have been content, hitherto, to leave unnoticed every other criticism that it has called forth. I have known all along that it contained errors which initiates would detect, but by the time any student might be in a position to appreciate these he would be independent of its guidance, and till then he could not be embarrassed²¹ by them. Now however, I regret to find that *The Secret Doctrine* is not merely concerned to expand and develop the earlier teaching — a task which I should be the first to recognise could be performed by no one more efficiently than by yourself — but paves the way for its expositions by remarks on *Esoteric Buddhism* which are not in the nature of fresh revelations concerning what are, doubtless, its many shortcomings, but are in the nature of disparagements²² which you have, on former occasions rebuked others for putting forward.

You say — in objecting to my title — “the esoteric truths, presented in Mr. Sinnett’s work, had ceased to be esoteric from the moment they were made public.” Is not that an odd objection to appear on the first page of a book called “*The Secret Doctrine*.” Has the doctrine ceased to deserve that designation from the date at which your own book appeared?²³

These questions however are all of minor importance, though it puzzles me to understand why your view of them should have been so diametrically reversed from what it was a few years ago.²⁴ I might hardly have written this letter at all, but for a passage in *The Secret Doctrine* referring to *Esoteric Buddhism* that occurs on page 169. There you suggest that my own attempt to explain planetary evolution fails for want of being sufficiently metaphysical, and you quote a phrase from me — “on pure metaphysics of that sort we are not now engaged” — in connexion with a passage from one of the letters of instruction I received when the book was under preparation. “And in such case,” you say, “as the Teacher remarks in a letter to him, ‘Why this preaching of our doctrines, all this uphill work and swimming *in adversum flumen*?’”²⁵ Any reader will imagine that the passage quoted from the letter had reference to the passage quoted from the book.²⁶ Nothing can be further from the fact. My remark about not being “then” concerned with “pure metaphysics” had a limited and specific application, and on the next page I see that I have dealt with that period before the earliest manifestations of Nature on the plane of the senses, when the work

and for publication in *Lucifer*, from friends as well as from foes, that forced us to see the question in its true light. Had they (the criticisms) been directed only against us *personally* (Mr. Sinnett and H.P. Blavatsky) they would have been left entirely unnoticed. But as all such had a direct bearing upon the doctrines taught — some persisting in calling them *Buddhism*, pure and simple, and others charging them with being a *new-fangled doctrine* invented by ourselves and fathered upon Buddhism — the danger became imminent, and a public explanation was absolutely necessary. Moreover, the impression that it was a very materialistic teaching — *Esoteric Buddhism* being accused of upholding the Darwinian hypothesis — spread from the Indian and Vedantin to almost all the European theosophists. This had to be refuted, and — we do so in *The Secret Doctrine*. — [Ed.]

²⁰ No one has ever dreamt of denying that *Esoteric Buddhism* was a “trustworthy presentation” of the Master’s teachings *as a whole*. That which is asserted is simply that some *personal* speculations of its author were faulty, and led to erroneous conclusions, (a) on account of their incompleteness, and (b) because of the evident anxiety to reconcile them with modern *physical* science, instead of metaphysical philosophy. Very likely errors, emanating from a desire diametrically opposite, will be found in *The Secret Doctrine*. Why should any of us — aye, even the most learned in occult lore among theosophists — pose for infallibility? Let us humbly admit with Socrates that “all we know is, that *we know nothing*”; at any rate nothing in comparison to what we have still to learn. — [Ed.]

²¹ Not “embarrassed,” but *misled* — and it is precisely this which has happened. — [Ed.]

²² We demur to the expression. No “disparagement” whatever is meant, but simply an attempt is made to make certain tenets taught in our respective works more clear. Without such explanations, the statements made by both authors would be unavoidably denounced as contradictory. The general public rarely goes to the trouble of sifting such difficult metaphysical questions to the bottom, but judges on appearance. We have to acquaint first the reader with all the sides and aspects of a teaching before we allow him to accept or even to see in one of such a *dogma*. — [Ed.]

²³ It *has*, most unquestionably, if logic deserves its name. Our correspondent would have hardly made this query, intended as a hit and a satire, had he paid attention to what is said on pages xvii-xviii (the first and the second) of the *Introduction to The Secret Doctrine*, namely — “‘Esoteric Buddhism’ was an excellent work with a very unfortunate title, though *it meant no more* than does the title of this work, the ‘*Secret Doctrine*’;” which means, if anything, that no more than “*Esoteric Buddhism*” are those portions of the “*Secret Doctrine*” now explained in our volumes *any longer* “*secret*” — since *they are divulged*. We appeal to logicians and literary critics for a decision. — [Ed.]

²⁴ *Vide Supra* notes: the reasons are now explained. — [Ed.]

²⁵ [This sentence occurs in *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*, p. 193. Some, notably the Hare Brothers, in their hostile work entitled *Who Wrote the Mahatma Letters?* (by H.E. and W.L. Hare, London: Williams and Norgate, 1936), have asserted that the Latin expression in this sentence was no better than “dog-Latin.” This criticism is entirely unwarranted. *In adversum flumen* means *into* the current or stream flowing against one, while *in adverso flumine* — as has been suggested for the correct expression — means *in* the opposing current or stream. Both are good Latin and occur in a number of passages from the Classics. — *Boris de Zirkoff*]

²⁶ This remark of the Master was made in a general not in any specific application. But what of that? — [Ed.]

of evolution going on was concerned “with the elemental forces that underlie the phenomena of Nature as visible now and perceptible to the senses of Man.”²⁷

From time to time, amongst criticisms of *Esoteric Buddhism* that have appeared to me misdirected, I have heard this charge — that I have not appreciated the great doctrine metaphysically, that I have materialised its conceptions. I do not think I have ever before put pen to paper to combat this idea, though it has always struck me as curiously erroneous; but when language from yourself seems to fortify the impression I refer to, it is high time for me to explain, at any rate, my own attitude of mind.²⁸

The charge of materialising the doctrine seems to me to arise entirely from the fact that I have partially succeeded in making some parts of it intelligible. The disposition to regard vagueness of exposition as equivalent to spirituality of thought is very widely spread; and multitudes of people are unaccustomed to respect any phraseology that they find themselves enabled to understand. Unused to realise a thought with precision of imaginative insight, they fancy if it is presented vividly to the mind that it must have lost caste in the realms of idealism. They are used to regarding a brick as something with a definite shape and purpose, and an idea as a Protean shadow. Give the idea a specific plan in Nature, and it will seem to them materialised, even if concerned with conditions of life as remote from materiality as Devachanic emotion.

The succession of Cause and Effect seems itself materialised — in the mental atmosphere I am discussing — if it is represented, in its most interesting aspect, as forcing its way from one plane of nature to another.

For readers of this temperament *Esoteric Buddhism* may be materialistic; but as I venture to believe that it has been a bridge which has conducted many, and may bear many more, across the chasm which divides the interests and materialism of this life, from the realms of spiritual aspiration beyond, I have not yet seen reason to regret the mould in which it was cast, even though some of those who have used it in their time now despise its materialistic construction.²⁹ It would load your paper too heavily if I quoted passages to show how constantly I really emphasised the non-material aspects of its teaching; but I may perhaps be allowed one from the closing sentences of the chapter on “the universe,” in which I say: — “It” — the doctrine of the Esoteric Wisdom — “stoops to materialism, as it were, to link its methods with the logic of that system, and ascends to the highest realms of idealism to embrace and expound the most exalted aspirations of spirit.”³⁰

The truth of the whole matter is admirably expressed in a comprehensive sentence at the end of a long article on “The Metaphysical Basis of *Esoteric Buddhism*,” which appeared in *The Theosophist* for May, 1884, with the suggestive signature, Damodar K. Mavalankar. This runs:

“The reader will now perceive that *Esoteric Buddhism* is not a system of materialism. It is, as Mr. Sinnett calls it, ‘transcendental Materialism,’ which is non-materialism just as the absolute consciousness is non-consciousness. . . .”³¹

Any vindication of oneself must be a repulsive task. For many reasons I would rather have left all such questions alone, but to ignore unfavourable comments when these proceed from your own pen would be to treat them with less respect than is embodied in my present remarks.

In conclusion, since *The Secret Doctrine* so frequently discusses what *Esoteric Buddhism* meant to say as regards Darwinian evolution, let me endeavour to elucidate that point. The teaching I received on the subject of race evolution was very elementary. It was not exactly “fragmentary” (as has sometimes been

²⁷ [*Esoteric Buddhism*, American edition, p. 87. — Boris de Zirkoff]

²⁸ Once more we beg to assure our friend and colleague, Mr. Sinnett, that in saying what is said in *The Secret Doctrine* we did not for one moment contemplate the remarks as expressive of our *own personal objections* — seeing we know our correspondent’s ideas too well to have any. They were addressed to and directed against our benevolent critics: especially those who, with an impartiality most admirable, though worthy of a better fate, try to hit us both, and through us to upset the Esoteric Doctrine. Has not the latter been proclaimed by a number of well-wishers as an invention of H.P. Blavatsky’s? Did not even an admirably clever and learned man — the late C.W. King — claim, in his *The Gnostics and their Remains* [Preface, p. ix], to have

“ . . . reason for suspecting that the Sibyl of *Esoteric Buddhism* [i.e., your humble servant] drew the first notions of her new religion from the analysis of the Inner Man [to wit our seven principles], as set forth in my [his] first edition”!

This — because the most philosophical Gnostic works, especially the doctrines of Valentinus and Marcus — are full of our archaic esoteric ideas. Forsooth, it is high time that the defendant, also, should “rise and explain” her attitude in *The Secret Doctrine*, regardless of any one’s (even her own) personality! — [Ed.]

²⁹ No one we know of “despises,” but many, on the other hand, *rejoice*, and very much so, at being able to refer to it as “materialistic.” It was high time to disabuse and contradict them; and this letter from our correspondent, setting forth his true views and attitude *for the first time*, is one of the first good fruits produced by our remarks in *The Secret Doctrine*. It is an excellent check on our mutual enemies. — [Ed.]

³⁰ [Page 262, in 6th ed.]

³¹ These are the *verbatim* expressions of your friend and humble servant, the Editor. Damodar only repeated our views. But the “Damodars” are few, and there were, as our correspondent well knows, other Brahmins in England, who were the first to proclaim *Esoteric Buddhism materialistic to the core*, and who have always maintained this idea in others. — [Ed.]

said), but it was a skeleton statement, as regards all the problems of “Cosmogensis,” consequently it dealt merely with that cosmic progress of the spiritual inquiry through the various kingdoms of Nature which, beginning (on the material plane) with the mineral, culminates in Man. It follows from this elementary statement that at some stage of the great evolutionary process there is an ascent from the animal to the human kingdom,³² never mind where the transition is effected. There the teaching vindicated the spirit of the Darwinian idea³³ though the further illumination now cast upon the subject by your present work shows that many specific conjectures of Darwinism are erroneous, and its application to the human evolution of this world period altogether misleading. It is needless to say that I was not furnished with the later teaching on this subject when *Esoteric Buddhism* was written, therefore of course my own impression at the time was that the doctrine supported the Darwinian hypothesis, as a general idea. I never heard a word breathed in India, when writing *Esoteric Buddhism*, to the contrary effect.³⁴

Nor was the point worth raising then. My readers had to be made acquainted with the primary principles of Karma, reincarnation and cosmic progress towards superior conditions of existence. All the cosmogensis that was essential to the comprehension of these principles was supplied in the teaching as given. Much was left for further development, for later opportunities. The first book of Euclid cannot also contain the second, third and fourth. In *The Secret Doctrine* I have no doubt we are furnished with esoteric teaching, which is the analogue of the more advanced geometry. Probably it will be least appreciated by those who read its opening pages as warning them off the subject of triangles.

Yours very respectfully,

A.P. SINNETT

Our closing remark

We thank Mr. Sinnett, with all our heart, for this letter. Better late than never. On page 186 of Vol. I of our *Secret Doctrine*, now just published, we quote from a letter of a member of the T.S., who wrote: “I suppose you realize that three-fourths of Theosophists and even outsiders imagine that, as far as the evolution of man is concerned, Darwinism and Theosophy kiss one another” in *Esoteric Buddhism*. We repudiate the idea most vehemently on the same page, but our negation would not go very far without that of Mr. Sinnett. The letter containing the above quoted sentence was written more than two and a half years ago; and our denial, notwithstanding the same charge of Darwinism and materialism in *Esoteric Buddhism*, was maintained by the same writer and supported by many others. Thus it was indispensable for the good of the Cause that Mr. Sinnett should deny it over his own signature. Our object is accomplished, for the author of *Esoteric Buddhism* has now solemnly repudiated the charge, and we hope to receive no more such flings at our philosophical beliefs.

We close by thanking our esteemed correspondent once more for the indulgent spirit in which he deals with our remarks, but which, to our regret, he very erroneously attributes to a personal feeling due to some unwarrantable change in our attitude

³² At the stage of the first Round, and partially at the second, never during any stage of the *Fourth* Round. A purely *mathematical* or rather algebraical reason exists for this: — The present (our) Round being the middle Round (between the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, and the 5th, 6th, and 7th) is one of adjustment and final equipoise between Spirit and matter. It is that point, in short, wherein the reign of *true* matter, its grossest state (which is as unknown to Science as its opposite pole — homogeneous matter or substance) stops and comes to an end. From that point physical man begins to throw off “coat after coat,” his material molecules for the benefit and subsequent formation or clothing of the animal kingdom, which in its turn is passing it on to the vegetable, and the latter to the mineral kingdoms. Man having evolved in the *first* Round from the animal *via* the two other kingdoms, it stands to reason that in the present Round he should appear *before* the animal world of *this* manvantaric period. But see *The Secret Doctrine* for particulars. — [Ed.]

³³ What did Darwin, or what Darwinians know of our esoteric teaching about “Rounds”! The “Spirit” of the Darwinian idea, is an *Irish bull*, in this case, as that “Spirit” is materialism of the grossest kind. — [Ed.]

³⁴ The reason for this also is stated in *The Secret Doctrine*.

towards himself. We repudiate such a charge, and hope that our explanations will dissipate the last vestiges of any such suspicion. — [Ed.]³⁵

Theosophy is not Buddhism, exoteric or esoteric

ENQUIRER. You are often spoken of as “Esoteric Buddhists.” Are you then all followers of Gautama Buddha?

THEOSOPHIST. No more than musicians are all followers of Wagner. Some of us are Buddhists by religion; yet there are far more Hindus and Brahmins than Buddhists among us, and more Christian-born Europeans and Americans than *converted* Buddhists. The mistake has arisen from a misunderstanding of the real meaning of the title of Mr. Sinnett’s excellent work, “Esoteric Buddhism,” which last word ought to have been spelt *with one, instead of two, d’s*, as then *Budhism* would have meant what it was intended for, merely “Wisdomism” (Bodha, bodhi, “intelligence,” “wisdom”) instead of *Buddhism*, Gautama’s religious philosophy. Theosophy, as already said, is the WISDOM-RELIGION.

ENQUIRER. What is the difference between Buddhism, the religion founded by the Prince of Kapilavastu, and *Budhism*, the “Wisdomism” which you say is synonymous with Theosophy?

THEOSOPHIST. Just the same difference as there is between the secret teachings of Christ, which are called “the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven,” and the later ritualism and dogmatic theology of the Churches and Sects. *Buddha* means the “Enlightened” by *Bodha*, or understanding, Wisdom. This has passed root and branch into the *esoteric* teachings that Gautama imparted to his chosen *Arhats* only.

ENQUIRER. But some Orientalists deny that Buddha ever taught any esoteric doctrine at all?

THEOSOPHIST. They may as well deny that Nature has any hidden secrets for the men of science. Further on I will prove it by Buddha’s conversation with his disciple Ananda. His esoteric teachings were simply the *Gupta Vidya* (secret knowledge) of the ancient Brahmins, the key to which their modern successors have, with few exceptions, completely lost. And this *Vidya* has passed into what is now known as the *inner* teachings of the *Mahayana* school of Northern Buddhism. Those who deny it are simply ignorant pretenders to Orientalism. I advise you to read the Rev. Mr. Edkins’ *Chinese Buddhism* — especially the chapters on the Exoteric and *Esoteric* schools and teachings — and then compare the testimony of the whole ancient world upon the subject.

ENQUIRER. But are not the ethics of Theosophy identical with those taught by Buddha?

THEOSOPHIST. Certainly, because these ethics are the soul of the Wisdom-Religion, and were once the common property of the initiates of all nations. But Buddha was the first to embody these lofty ethics in his public teachings, and to make them the

³⁵ Blavatsky *Collected Writings*, (ESOTERIC BUDDHISM AND THE SECRET DOCTRINE) X pp. 177-88

foundation and the very essence of his public system. It is herein that lies the immense difference between exoteric Buddhism and every other religion. For while in other religions ritualism and dogma hold the first and most important place, in Buddhism it is the ethics which have always been the most insisted upon. This accounts for the resemblance, amounting almost to identity, between the ethics of Theosophy and those of the religion of Buddha.

ENQUIRER. Are there any great points of difference?

THEOSOPHIST. One great distinction between Theosophy and *exoteric* Buddhism is that the latter, represented by the Southern Church, entirely denies (a) the existence of any Deity, and (b) any conscious *post-mortem* life, or even any self-conscious surviving individuality in man. Such at least is the teaching of the Siamese sect, now considered as the *purest* form of exoteric Buddhism. And it is so, if we refer only to Buddha's public teachings; the reason for such reticence on his part I will give further on. But the schools of the Northern Buddhist Church, established in those countries to which his initiated Arhats retired after the Master's death, teach all that is now called Theosophical doctrines, because they form part of the knowledge of the initiates — thus proving how the truth has been sacrificed to the dead-letter by the too-zealous orthodoxy of Southern Buddhism. But how much grander and more noble, more philosophical and scientific, even in its dead-letter, is this teaching than that of any other Church or religion. Yet Theosophy is not Buddhism.³⁶

Bodhi and Sophia are one and the same, supersensuous wisdom from within

Besides, the whole of our literature proves that *real* Theosophists, worshipping universal wisdom, worship in reality the same wisdom which has been proclaimed by St. James in the third chapter of his *Epistle* [verse 17], *i.e.*,

“the wisdom that is from above (*σοφία ἀνωθεν*) [which] is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy,”

avoiding, on the advice of the same Apostle [verse 15], wisdom that

“is earthly, sensual, devilish (*ψυχική, δαιμονιώδης*).”³⁷

Therefore, if trying to follow to the extent of our strength the higher wisdom, we use the word *Bodhi*, instead of *Sophia*, it is first because both words, the Sanskrit and the Greek, are *synonymous*, and second because for every European Fellow we have some fifty Asiatic Fellows — Brāhmanas and Buddhists.³⁸

³⁶ *Key to Theosophy*, § I (THEOSOPHY AND THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY) pp. 12-15

³⁷ [Not to be confused with Δαίμων-Daimōn that relates to our Divine Spirit, the seventh Principle, and to our Dhyāni-Chohans. Cf. *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (POST-CHRISTIAN MYSTERIES) XIV p. 307 *fn.* Also cf. Socrates' *daimonion*, Caesar's *ghost*, Cicero's *divinum quiddam*. *Ibid.*, (HUXLEY AND SLADE) I p. 229 — ED. PHIL.]

³⁸ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (NEO-BUDDHISM) XII p. 339