

*Selfishness is the hallmark of  
fakirs, hermits, and yogins*



## ***Abstract***<sup>1</sup>

Solitary ascetics are symbols of the most cowardly egotism.

No one can escape from the clutches of Karma by adopting masterly inactivity. For how can a hermit practice charity or industry if he runs away from man?

The greatest ascetics and saints of our own day are not those who retire into inaccessible places, They live in the midst of us. Lord Buddha retreated from society only for the first six years of his ascetic life.

“Self-culture” is for cloistered yogīns who live apart from the society of their fellow human beings: they are spiritually selfish!

Some theosophists have arrived at a certain hostility and indignation towards matter. But “where two or three are gathered” in the name of the Spirit of Truth — the Spirit of Theosophy will be in the midst of them.



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<sup>1</sup> Frontispiece by Alphagr1

## Solitary ascetics are symbols of the most cowardly egotism

“And there is a different Band who know and do good, without practising austerities, and who investigate the real nature of things by the guidance of reason, and live as *Sirdāsp*.”

*Persian Note* — *The Sirdāsp are such as seek good without mortifying their bodies in devotion.*

COMMENTARY. — The *Sirdāsp* is that searcher after God, who seeks Him without (subjecting himself to) abstinence in food or sleep, and without (affecting) solitary seclusion; who attempts to explain hidden things by the guidance of the understanding; and who does not deem it lawful to hurt anything having life. The two classes that have been mentioned are distinguished as the enlightened and the guides.

— *Desatir*<sup>1</sup>

European Theosophists have very little to do with “asceticism.” It is a hereditary disease of the *Hatha-Yogīs*, the Hindū prototypes of the Christians who whip themselves and mortify their flesh until they become idiots and converse with the Devil without converting him. The Theosophists, even in India, protest against the *Yogism* of the fakirs. A solitary ascetic<sup>2</sup> is a symbol of *the most cowardly egotism*; a hermit who flees from his brothers instead of helping them to carry the burden of life, to work for others, and to put their shoulders to the wheel of social life, is a coward who hides himself when the battle is on, and goes to sleep drunk on an opiate. *Asceticism*, as understood by exoteric religions, has produced the ignorant fools who throw themselves under the chariot of Juggernaut. If these unfortunate people had studied the esoteric philosophy, they would know that under the dead letter of the dogma taught by the Brāhmanas — exploiters, like all priests, inheritors of the possessions of their victims, who are driven to madness by superstitious terrors — is hidden a profoundly philosophical meaning; they would know that their bodies which they crush under the wheels of the chariot of *Jagan-nātha* (*Juggernaut* in the popular dialect — meaning Lord of the World or *Anima mundi*) are the symbols of the gross material passions which this “chariot” (the divine and spiritual soul) must crush. Knowing this they would not apply the moral and spiritual asceticism taught by esotericism to their bodies — the mere outer animal husk of the god which is latent within. The Theoso-

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<sup>1</sup> *The Desatir or the Sacred Writings of the Ancient Prophets*, tr. by Mulla Firuz Bin Kaus, Bombay, 1818, 2 vols.; with additional notes by Dhunjeebhoy Jamsetjee Medhora, Bombay, 1888; “The Book of the Prophet, the Great Abad,” *vs.* 130, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> [Cf. “The Pratyeka-Buddha, the Buddha of Selfishness — called because of this spiritual selfishness “the rhinoceros,” the solitary animal — can never pass beyond the third plane, that of Jīva. Such a one has conquered, indeed, his material desires, but he has not yet freed himself from his *mental* and *spiritual* longings. It is the Buddha of Compassion only that can transcend this third macrocosmic plane.” *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (E.S. INSTRUCTION No. IV) XII p. 659 — ED. PHIL.]

phists of India labour to destroy exoteric asceticism, of the “deification of suffering,” veritable *Satanism* of superstition.<sup>1</sup>

**No one can escape from the clutches of Karma by adopting masterly inactivity.**

Not only European Sanskritists but also exoteric Yogīs, fall into the grievous mistake of supposing that, in the opinion of our sacred writers, a human being can escape the operation of the law of *Karma* by adopting a condition of masterly inactivity, entirely losing sight of the fact that even a rigid abstinence from physical acts does not produce inactivity on the higher astral and spiritual planes. Sri Śamkara has very conclusively proved, in his Commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gīta*, such a supposition is nothing short of a delusion. The great teacher shows there that forcibly repressing the physical body from working does not free one from *vāsana* or *vritti* — the inherent inclination of the mind to work. There is a tendency, in every department of nature, of an act to repeat itself; so the Karma acquired in the last preceding birth is always trying to forge fresh links in the chain and thereby lead to continued material existence; and that this tendency can only be counteracted by unselfishly performing all the duties appertaining to the sphere in which a person is born — that alone can produce *chitta suddhi*, without which the capacity of perceiving spiritual truths can never be acquired.

A few words must here be said about the physical inactivity of the Yogī or the Mahatma. Inactivity of the physical body (*sthūla śarīra*) does not indicate a condition of inactivity either on the astral or the spiritual plane of action. The human spirit is in its highest state of activity in *samādhi*, and not, as is generally supposed, in a dormant quiescent condition.

. . . the initiatory training of a true Vedantīn Raja Yogī must be nourishing of a sleepless and ardent desire of doing all in his power for the good of mankind on the ordinary physical plane, his activity being transferred, however, to the higher astral plane and spiritual planes as his development proceeds. In course of time as the Truth becomes realized, the situation is rendered quite clear to the Yogī and he is placed beyond the criticism of any ordinary man. The *Mahanirvana Tantra* says: —

*Charanti trigunātīte ko vidhir ko nishedhovā.*

“For one, walking beyond the three *gunas* — *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* — what duty or what restriction is there?” — in the consideration of men, walled in on all sides by the objective plane of existence.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (MISCONCEPTIONS) VIII p. 73

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* (MORALITY AND PANTHEISM) V pp. 338, 339; [later printings made clear that Mohini Mohun Chatterji was the author of this article.]

## How can a hermit practice charity or industry if he runs away from man?

[In the *Yogāchārya* or the contemplative Mahayana schools] . . . the hermit or yogī life, except for a few years of preliminary teaching, *is strongly objected to* and called SELFISHNESS.<sup>1</sup>

One of [Mahayana's] fundamental laws is, that ordinary morality is insufficient to deliver one from re-birth; one has to practice the six Pāramitās or cardinal virtues for it:

1. Charity.
2. Chastity.
3. Patience.
3. Industry.
5. Meditation.
6. Ingenuousness (or openness of heart, sincerity).

And how can a *hermit* practice charity or industry if he runs away from man?<sup>2</sup>

**Lord Buddha retreated from society only for the first six years of his ascetic life.**

The Lord Gautama was never a *hermit*, save during the first six years of his ascetic life, the time it took him to enter fully “on the Path.” In the “Supplementary account of the three religions” (*San-Kiea-Yi-su*) it is stated that in the *seventh* year of his exercises of abstinence and solitary meditation, Buddha thought, “I had better eat, lest the heretics should say that Nirvāna is attained in famishing the body.” Then he ate, sat for his transformation for six more days and on the seventh day of the second month obtained his first *Samadhi*. Then, having “attained the perfect view of the highest truth,” he arose and went to Benares where he delivered his first discourses. From that time forward for nearly half a century, he *remained in the world*, teaching the world salvation. His first disciples were nearly all Upāsakas (lay brothers), the neophytes being permitted to continue in their positions in social life and not even required to join the monastic community. And those who did, were generally sent by the Master to travel and proselytize . . .<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (WORLD-IMPROVEMENT OR WORLD-DELIVERANCE) XI p. 347

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, XI p. 348; [Cf. “Genuine ascetics never sit in populated places, but dwell either in the solitude of the forest or in the courts of the temples, where no unsympathetic eye can reach them . . .” — *Caves and Jungles of Hindostan*, p. 342]

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, XI pp. 346-47

**“The greatest ascetics and saints of our own day are not those who retire into inaccessible places,” They live in the midst of us.**



**Some theosophists have arrived at a certain hostility and indignation towards matter.**

Gautama the Buddha only remained in solitude long enough to enable him to arrive at the truth, to the promulgation of which he devoted himself from that time on, begging his bread, and living for humanity. Jesus retired to the desert for forty days only, and died for this same humanity. Apollonius of Tyana, Plotinus and Iamblichus, while leading lives of singular abstinence, almost of asceticism, lived in the world and *for* the world. The greatest ascetics and *saints* of our own day are not those who retire into inaccessible places, but those who pass their lives in travelling from place to place, doing good and trying to raise mankind; although they may avoid Europe, and those civilized countries where no one has any eyes or ears except for himself, countries divided into two camps — those of Cain and Abel.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, religion and ethics, which may be fitly called — the practice of ideas, or the introduction of ideas into life — have an analogous effect with all lower culture, in degrading nature and suggesting its dependence on spirit. Ethics and religion differ herein; that the one is the system of human duties commencing from man; the other, from God. Religion includes the personality of God; Ethics does not. They are one to our present design. They both put nature under foot. The first and last lesson of religion is, “The things that are seen, are temporal; the things that are unseen, are eternal.” It puts an affront upon nature. It does that for the unschooled, which philosophy does for Berkeley and Viasa. The uniform language that may be heard in the churches of the most ignorant sects, is — “Contemn the unsubstantial shows of the world; they are vanities, dreams, shadows, unrealities; seek the realities of religion.” The devotee flouts nature. Some theosophists have arrived at a certain hostility and indignation towards matter, as the Manichean and Plotinus. They distrusted in themselves any looking back to these flesh-pots of Egypt. Plotinus was ashamed of his body. In short, they might all say of matter, what Michael Angelo said of external beauty, “it is the frail and weary weed, in which God dresses the soul, which he has called into time.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blavatsky *Collected Writings*, (THE BEACON OF THE UNKNOWN) XI p. 255

<sup>2</sup> Emerson: *Nature* (1836), VI (IDEALISM)

**“Self-culture” is for cloistered yogins who live apart from the society of their fellow human beings: they are spiritually selfish!**

**But “where two or three are gathered” in the name of the Spirit of Truth — the Spirit of Theosophy will be in the midst of them.**

“Theosophy teaches *self-culture* and not control,” we are told. Theosophy teaches *mutual-culture* before *self-culture* to begin with. Union is strength. It is by gathering many theosophists of the same way of thinking into one or more groups, and making them united by the same magnetic bond of fraternal unity and sympathy that the objects of *mutual* development and progress in Theosophical thought may be best achieved. “Self-culture” is for isolated *Hatha Yogīs*, independent of any Society and having to avoid association with human beings; and this is a *triple distilled* SELFISHNESS. For real moral advancement — there “where two or three are gathered” in the name of the SPIRIT OF TRUTH — there that Spirit of Theosophy *will be in the midst of them.*<sup>1</sup>



In one respect only are the adepts *we* know, like Yogīs; namely, in their great purity of life, self-abnegation, and the practice of Dhyāna and Samadhi.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Blavatsky *Collected Writings*, (“ORIGINAL PROGRAMME” MANUSCRIPT) VII pp. 160-61

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, (FOOTNOTES TO “WHO ARE THE ARYAS AND THE BUDDHISTS?”) III p. 304