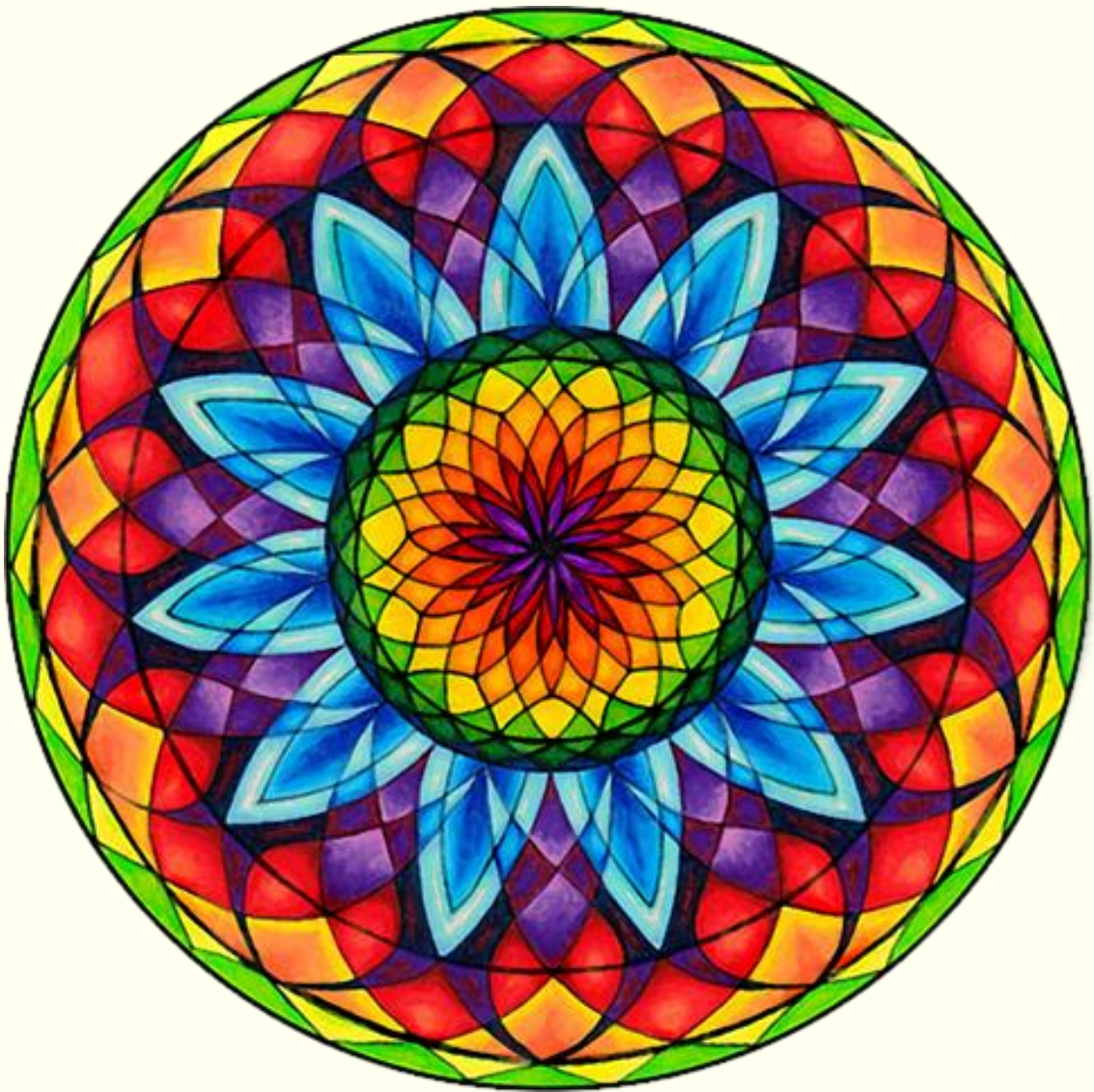


*Buddhism in action is  
unconditional compassion,  
wise and merciful*



## Buddhism in action is unconditional compassion, wise and merciful.

**Every man has a responsive chord in his heart that will vibrate and respond to kindness and gentleness.**

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[Annotated by H.P. Blavatsky in her capacity as Editor of *Lucifer*.]

You yourself must make an effort. The Tathāgatas are only preachers. If a man find no prudent companion, let him walk alone like a king who has left his conquered country behind. It is better to live alone; there is no companionship with the *fools*. Let a man walk alone; let him commit no sin, with few wishes — like a rhinoceros in the forest.

*Dhammapada* 61, 276, 329, 330  
*Sutta-Nipata* I, 3, §12-13

[From Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden]<sup>1</sup>

To the Editor of *Lucifer*.

A very important paragraph which you wrote in No. 3 of your *Revue Théosophique*, published in Paris, May 21<sup>st</sup> 1889 (pp. 6-7), has caused very serious doubts in the minds of some of your readers in Germany — doubts, probably caused by our misunderstanding you or by your shortness of expression. Will you permit me to state our view of the case, and will you have the kindness to give us on this basis your opinion of it publicly, perhaps in *Lucifer*?

You were speaking of Indian “yogis” and European “saints” and said:

. . . La Sagesse<sup>2</sup> Orientale nous apprend que le *Yogi* Indou qui s’isole dans une forêt impénétrable, ainsi que *l’hermite* chrétien qui se retire, comme aux temps jadis, dans le désert, ne sont tous deux que des égoïstes accomplis. L’un, agit

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<sup>1</sup> [Look up “De Zirkoff on Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden,” in our Theosophy and Theosophists Series. — ED. PHIL.]

<sup>2</sup> The editor of *Lucifer* and the *Revue Théosophique*, pleads guilty to an omission. She ought to have qualified, «la Sagesse Orientale» by adding the adjective «ésotérique». H.P. Blavatsky

dans l'unique but de trouver dans l'essence une et nirvanique refuge contre la réincarnation; l'autre, dans le but de sauver son âme — tous les deux ne pensent qu'à eux-mêmes. Leur motif est tout *personnel*; car, en admettant qu'ils atteignent le but, ne sont-ils pas comme le soldat poltron, qui déserte *l'armée* au moment de [344] l'action, pour se préserver des balles? En s'isolant ainsi, ni le Yogi, ni le «*saint*», n'aident personne autre qu'eux-mêmes; ils se montrent, par contre, *profondément indifférents* au sort de *l'humanité* qu'ils *fuiet et désertent* . . . <sup>1</sup>

You do not plainly say what you expect a true sage to do; but further on you refer to our Lord, the Buddha, and to what *He* did. We readily accept His example as well as His teachings for our ideal rule; but from those stanzas I have quoted above, it appears, that what he expected his disciples to do, does not quite agree with what you seem to expect from them.<sup>2</sup> [345]

He taught that all the world, or the three worlds, in fact, every existence, is pain, or leading to pain and grief. World and existence is pain and evil *per se*. It is a mistake (avidyā) to believe that desire can be satisfied. All worldly desires lead in the end to dissatisfaction, and the desire (the thirst) to live is the cause of all evil. Only those who are striving to deliver (to save or to redeem) themselves from all existence (from their thirst for existence), leading the “happy life” of a perfect Bhikshu, only those are sages, only those attain nirvana and, when they die, parinirvāna, which is absolute and changeless being.<sup>3</sup>

No doubt some sort of development or so-called improvement, evolution and involution, is going on in the world; but just for this reason the Buddha taught (like Krishna before him), that the world is, “unreality, māyā, avidyā.” Every actual form of ex-

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<sup>1</sup> [“ . . . Oriental Wisdom teaches us that the Hindu Yogi who isolates himself in an impenetrable forest, like the Christian *hermit* who, as was common in former times, retires to the desert, are both of them but accomplished egoists. The one acts with the sole idea of finding in the One essence of Nirvāna refuge against reincarnation; the other acts with the unique idea of saving his soul — both of them think only of themselves. Their motive is altogether *personal*; for, even supposing they attain their end, are they not like cowardly soldiers, who desert the *regiment* when it goes into action, in order to protect themselves from the bullets? In isolating themselves as they do, neither the Yogi nor the “*saint*” helps anyone but himself; on the contrary, both show themselves *profoundly indifferent* to the fate of *mankind* whom they *fly* from and *desert*. . .”]

<sup>2</sup> The Western disciples and followers of the Lord Buddha's ethics lay very little stress on the dead letter (and often fanciful) translations of Buddhist *Sutras* by European Orientalists. From such scholars as Messrs. Max Müller and Weber, down to the last amateur Orientalist who dabbles in Buddhism disfigured by translation and proudly boasts of his knowledge, no Sanskrit or Pali scholar has so far understood correctly that which is taught; witness Monier-Williams' fallacious assumption that Buddha never taught anything *esoteric*! Therefore neither the *Dhammapada* nor the *Sutta-Nipata* are an exception, nor a proof to us in their now mutilated and misunderstood texts. Nāgārjuna laid it down, as a rule, that “every Buddha has both a revealed and a mystic doctrine.” The “exoteric is for the multitudes and new disciples,” to whom our correspondent evidently belongs. This plain truth was understood even by such a prejudiced scholar as the Rev. J. Edkins, who passed almost all his life in China studying Buddhism, and who says in his *Chinese Buddhism*:

The esoteric is for the Bodhisattvas and advanced pupils, such as Kāśyapa. It is not communicated in the form of definite language, and *could not*, therefore, *be transmitted by Ananda as definite doctrine among the Sutras*. Yet *it is virtually contained in the Sutras*. For example, the *Fa-hua-Ching*, or “*Sutra of the Lotus of the Good Law*,” which is regarded as containing the cream of the revealed doctrine, is to be viewed as a sort of original document *of the esoteric teaching, while it is in form exoteric*. [Ch. iii, p. 43. Italics are ours.]

Moreover we perceive that our learned correspondent has entirely misunderstood the fundamental idea in what we wrote in our May editorial, «Le Phare de l'Inconnu» in the *Revue Théosophique*. We protest against such an interpretation and will prove that it errs in the course of this article. H.P. Blavatsky

<sup>3</sup> An exoteric and frequent mistake. Nirvāna may be reached during man's life, and after his death in the Manvantara or life-kalpa he belongs to. *Parinirvāna* (“beyond” Nirvāna) is reached only when the Manvantara has closed and during the “night” of the universe or *Pralaya*. Such is the esoteric teaching. H.P. Blavatsky

istence has become, has grown to be what it is; it will continue *changing* and will have an end, [346] like it had a beginning as a form. *Absolute being* without “form” and “name,” this alone is true reality, and is worth striving at for a real sage.<sup>1</sup>

Now what did our Lord, the Buddha, do and how did He live? He did not in any way try to *improve* the *world*; he did not strive to realise socialistic problems, to solve the labour question or to better the *worldly* affairs of the poor, nor the rich either; he did not meddle with science, he did not teach cosmology and such like;<sup>2</sup> quite on the contrary; he lived in the most *unworldly* manner, he begged for his food and taught his disciples to do the same; he left, and taught his disciples to leave, all worldly life and affairs, to give up their families and to remain homeless, like he did and like he lived himself.<sup>3</sup> [347]

Against this cannot be brought forward, that these are only the teachings of the Hinayana system and that perhaps the Mahayana of the Northern Buddhists is the only right one; for this latter lays even more stress than the former on the *self-improvement* and continued *retirement* from the world of the bhikshu, *until* he has reached the perfection of a Buddha. True, the Mahayana system says that not *every* Arahat has already attained highest perfection; it distinguishes Śrāvakas, Pratyeka-Buddhas, and Bodhisattvas, of whom the latter only are considered the true spiritual sons of the Buddha, who are to be Buddhas themselves in their final future life and who have already realised the highest state of ecstasy, the Bodhi state, which is next to Nirvana.

Until a bhikshu or arhat has sufficiently progressed in perfection and wisdom, “playing at”<sup>4</sup> Buddha and fixing himself up as an example, or as a teacher to the world, is likely not only to throw him entirely off his path, but also to cause annoyance to those who *are* truly qualified for such work and who *are* fit to serve as ideal examples for others. None of us is a Buddha, and I do not know which of us might be a Bodhi-

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<sup>1</sup> Just so; and this is the theosophical teaching. H.P. Blavatsky

<sup>2</sup> *Mālunkya Sutta*, in Spence Hardy, *Manual of Buddhism*, p. 375. *Samyutta Nikāya* at the end of the work (Vol. iii of “Phayre MS.”; also *Cullavagga*, IX, 1, 4). H.P. Blavatsky

<sup>3</sup> Quite right again. But to live “like he lived himself” one has to remain *as an ascetic* among the multitudes, or the *world*, for 45 years. This argument therefore, goes directly against our correspondent’s main idea. That against which we protested in the criticized article was not the *ascetic life*, *i.e.*, the life of one entirely divorced, morally and mentally, from the world, the ever-changing *māyā*, with its false deceptive pleasures, but the life of a *hermit*, useless to all and as useless to himself, in the long run; at any rate *entirely selfish*. \* We believe we rightly understand our learned critic in saying that the point of his letter lies in the appeal to the teaching and practice of the Lord Gautama Buddha in support of withdrawal and isolation from the world, as contrasted with an opposite course of conduct. And here is where his mistake lies, and he opens himself to a severer and more just criticism than that he would inflict on us.

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, instructing in the doctrine of the four miseries all those with whom they met. H.P. Blavatsky

\* [Look up “Selfishness is the cause of all sin and suffering” and “Selfishness is the hallmark of fakirs, hermits, and yogins,” in our Black versus White Magic Series. — ED. PHIL.]

<sup>4</sup> [imitating]

sattva; not everyone *can* be one, and not everyone was by the Buddha himself expected to *become* one, as is clearly and repeatedly expressed in the *Saddharma Pundarika*, the principal Mahayana work.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, [348] admitting for argument's sake, that we were somehow fit to serve as specimen sages for "the world" and to improve "humanity" — now what *can* and what *ought* we to do then?

We certainly can have nothing to do with humanity in the sense of the "world," nothing with *worldly affairs* and *their* improvement. What else should we do, than to be «*profondément indifférents*» to them, to «*fuir et désert*er» them? Is not this "army" which we are deserting, just that "humanity" which the *Dhammapada* rightly terms "the fools"; [349] and is it not just that "worldly life" which our Lord taught us to quit? What else should we strive at then but to take "refuge against re-incarnation," refuge with the Buddha, his dharma and his sangha!<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Our correspondent is too well read in Buddhist *Sutras* not to be aware of the existence of the esoteric system taught *precisely* in the *Yogāchāra* or the contemplative Mahayana schools. And in that system the hermit or yogi life, except for a few years of preliminary teaching, is *strongly objected to* and called SELFISHNESS. Witness Buddha in those superb pages of *Light of Asia* (Book the Fifth) when arguing with and reprimanding the self-torturing Yogis, whom, "sadly eyeing," the Lord asks:

. . . Wherefore add ye ills to life  
Which is so evil?

When told in answer that they stake brief agonies to gain the larger joys of Nirvana, what does He say? This:

Yet if they last  
A myriad years . . . they fade at length,  
Those joys . . . Speak! Do your Gods endure  
For ever, brothers?  
"Nay," the Yogis said,  
"Only great Brahm endures; the Gods but live."

Now if our correspondent understood as he should, these lines rendered in blank verse, yet word for word as in the *Sutras*, he would have a better idea of the esoteric teaching than he now has; and, having understood it, he would not oppose what we said; for not only was self-torture, selfish solitude, and life in the jungle simply for one's own salvation condemned in the *Mahayana* (in the real esoteric system, not the mutilated translations he reads) but even *renunciation of Nirvana for the sake of mankind* is preached therein. One of its fundamental laws is, that ordinary morality is insufficient to deliver one from rebirth; one has to practice the six Pāramitās or cardinal virtues for it: 1. Charity. 2. Chastity. 3. Patience. 4. Industry. 5. Meditation. 6. Ingenuousness (or openness of heart, sincerity). [From *The Voice of the Silence*, frag. III, vs. 200-14, pp. 36-48. Full text in our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series. — ED. PHIL.]

And how can a *hermit* practice charity or industry if he runs away from man? Bodhisattvas, who, having fulfilled all the conditions of Buddhahood, have the right to forthwith enter Nirvana, prefer instead, out of unlimited pity for the suffering ignorant world, to renounce this state of bliss and become *Nirmānakāyas*. They don the *Sambhogakāya* (the invisible body) in order to serve mankind, *i.e.*, to *live a sentient life after death* and suffer immensely at the sight of human miseries (most of which, being Karmic, they are not at liberty to relieve) for the sake of having a chance of inspiring a few with the desire of learning the truth and thus saving themselves. (By the by, all that Schlagintweit and others have written about the *Nirmānakāya* body is erroneous.) Such is the true meaning of the Mahayana teaching. "I believe that not all the Buddhas enter Nirvana," says, among other things, the disciple of the Mahayana school in his address to "the Buddhas (or Bodhisattvas) of confession" — referring to this secret teaching. H.P. Blavatsky

<sup>2</sup> The quotation with which our correspondent heads his letter *does not* bear the interpretation he puts upon it. No one acquainted with the spirit of the metaphors used in Buddhist philosophy would read it as Dr. Hübbschleiden does. The man advised to walk "like a king who has left his conquered country behind," implies that he who has conquered his passions and for whom worldly *māyā* exists no longer, need not lose his time in trying to convert those who will not believe in him, but had better leave them alone to their Karma; but it certainly does not mean that they are fools intellectually. Nor does it imply that the disciples should leave the world; "Our Lord" taught us as much as "the Lord Jesus" did, the "Lord Krishna" and other "Lords" all "Sons of God" — to quit the "worldly" life, not *men*, least of all suffering, ignorant Humanity. But surely neither, the Lord Gautama Buddha less than any one of the above enumerated, would have taught us the monstrous and selfish doctrine of remaining «*profondément indifférents*» to the woes and miseries of mankind, or to *desert* those who cry daily and hourly for help to us, more favoured than they. This is an outrageously selfish and cruel system of life, by whomsoever adopted! It is neither Buddhist, nor Christian, nor theosophical, but the nightmare of a doctrine of the worst schools of Pessimism, such as would be probably discountenanced by Schopenhauer and von Hartmann themselves!

Our critic sees in the "army" of Humanity — those "fools" that the *Dhammapada* alludes to. We are sorry to find him calling himself *names*, as we suppose he still belongs to Humanity, whether he likes it or not. And if he tells us in the exuberance of his modesty that he is quite prepared to fall under the flattering category, then we

But we further think, that the Buddha — as in every other respect — was quite right also on this point, even if one considers it as a scientist, as an historian, or as a psychologist, not as a bhikshu. What real and essential improvement of the “world” can be made? Perhaps in carrying out socialistic problems a state might be arrived at, where every human [350] individual would be sufficiently cared for, so that he *could* addict<sup>1</sup> more *spare* time to his spiritual self-improvement if he *wished* to do so; but if he does *not wish* to improve *himself*, the best social organization will not make or help him do so. On the contrary, my own experience, at least, is just the reverse. The spiritually or rather mystically highest developed living human individual I know is a poor common weaver and moreover consumptive, who was until lately in such a position employed in a cotton-mill, that he was as such treated as a dog, like most labourers are, by their joint-stock employers. Still this man is in his inner life quite independent of his worldly misery; his heavenly or rather divine peace and satisfaction is at any time his refuge, and no one can rob [351] him of that. He fears no death, no hunger, no pain, no want, no injustice, no cruelty.<sup>2</sup>

You will concede, I suppose, that Karma is not originated by external causes, but only by each individual for himself. Anyone who has made himself fit for and worthy of a good opportunity, will surely find it; and if you put another unworthy one into the very best of circumstances, he will not avail himself of them properly; they will rather serve *him* to draw him down into the mire which is his delight.

But perhaps you reply: it is, nevertheless, our duty to create as many good opportunities as we can, for humanity in general, that all those who are worthy of them, might find them all the sooner. Quite right! We fully agree and we are certainly doing our best in this respect. But will this improve the *spiritual* welfare of “humanity”? Never, not by an atom, we think. Humanity, as a *whole*, will always remain comparatively the same “fools,” which they have always been. Suppose we had succeeded in establishing an ideal organization of mankind, do you think these “fools” would be any the wiser by it, or any the more satisfied and happy?<sup>3</sup> Certainly not, they would always invent new wants, new pretensions, new claims; the “world” will forever go on striving for “worldly perfection” only. Our present social organization is greatly improved on the system of the Middle-Ages; still, is our present time any the happier, any the more satisfied than our ancestors have been at the time of the Nibelungs or of King Arthur? I think, if there has been any change in satisfaction, it was for the worse; our present time is more greedy and less content than any former age. Whoever expects his *self*-improvement by means of any *world*-improvement or any exter-

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answer that no true Buddhist ought, agreeably to the Dhammapadic injunctions, to accept “companionship” with him. This does not promise him a very brilliant future with “the Buddha, his dharma and his sangha.” To call the whole of Humanity “fools” is a risky thing, anyhow; to treat as such that portion of mankind which groans and suffers under the burden of its national and individual Karma, and refuse it, under this pretext, help and sympathy — is positively revolting. He who does not say with the Master: “Mercy alone opens the gate to save the whole race of mankind” is unworthy of that Master. H.P. Blavatsky

<sup>1</sup> [devote]

<sup>2</sup> And yet this man lives *in*, and with the world, which fact does not prevent his *inner* “Buddhaship”; *nor* shall he ever be called a “deserter” and a coward, epithets which he would richly deserve had he abandoned his wife and family, instead of working *for them*, not for his own “dear” self. H.P. Blavatsky

<sup>3</sup> This is no business of ours, but that of their respective Karma. On this principle we should have to deny to every starving wretch a piece of bread, because, forsooth, he will be just as hungry tomorrow? H.P. Blavatsky

nal means and causes, has yet to be sorely undeceived; and happy for him if this experience will come to him before the *end* of his present life!

A very clever modern philosopher has invented the theory that the best plan to get rid of this misery of the “world,” would be our giving ourselves up to it the best we could, in order to hasten this evil process [352] to its early end. — Vain hope! Avidyā is as endless as it is beginningless. A universe has a beginning and has an end, but others will begin and end after it, just like one day follows the other; and as there has been an endless series of worlds before, thus will there be an endless series afterwards. Causality can never have had a beginning nor can it have an end. And every “world,” that will ever be, will always be “world,” that is pain and “evil.”<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, like Karma, also *deliverance*, redemption or salvation (from the world) can never be any otherwise than “*personal*,” or let us rather say “*individual*.” The world, of course, can never be delivered from itself, from the “world,” from pain and evil. And *no one* can be delivered therefrom by anyone else. — You certainly do not teach vicarious atonement! Or, *can* anyone save his neighbour? Can one apple make ripe another apple hanging next to it?<sup>2</sup>

Now what else can we do but live the “happy life” of Bhikshus without wants, without pretensions, without desires? And if our good example calls or draws to us others who seek for the same happiness, then we try to teach them the best we can. But this is another rather doubtful [353] question to us! Not only are we not properly fit to teach, but if we were, we require proper persons to be taught, persons who are not only willing, but who are also fit to listen to us.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of all these difficulties and quite conscious of our own incompetency, we nevertheless venture now to publish books and journals in which we try to explain Indian religio-philosophy to the best of our understanding. Thus every one who has eyes may read it, and who has ears may hear it — if his good Karma is ripening!

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<sup>1</sup> And therefore, *sauve qui peut*, is our correspondent’s motto? Had the  
All Honoured, Wisest, Best, most Pitiful,  
The Teacher of Nirvana, and the Law,

taught the heartless principle *après moi le déluge*, I do not think that the learned editor of the *Sphinx* would have had much of a chance of being converted to Buddhism as he is now. Very true that his Buddhism seems to be no better than the exoteric dry and half-broken rind, of European fabrication, of that grand fruit of altruistic mercy, and pity for all that lives — real Eastern Buddhism and especially its esoteric doctrines. H.P. Blavatsky

<sup>2</sup> No; but the apple can either screen its neighbour from the sun, and, depriving it of its share of light and heat, prevent its ripening, or sharing with it the dangers from worms and the urchin’s hand, thus diminish that danger by one-half. As to Karma this is again a misconception. There is such a thing as a *national*, besides a personal or *individual* Karma in this world. But our correspondent seems to have either never heard of it, or misunderstood once more, in his own way. H.P. Blavatsky

<sup>3</sup> *Fais que dois, advienne que pourra*. [Do what you must, i.e., do your best, come what may.] When did the Lord Buddha make a preliminary selection in his audiences? Did he not, agreeably to allegory and history, preach and convert demons and gods, bad and good men? Dr. Hübbe-Schleiden seems more Catholic than the Pope, more prim than an old-fashioned English housewife, and certainly more squeamish than Lord Buddha ever was. “Teach vicarious atonement?” certainly we do not. But it is safer (and more modest at any rate) to make too much of one’s neighbours and fellowmen than to look at every one as on so much dirt under one’s feet. If I am a fool, it is no reason why I should see a fool in everyone else. We leave to our critic the difficult task of discerning who is, and who is *not* fit to listen to us, and, in the absence of positive proof, prefer postulating that every man has a responsive chord in his nature that will vibrate and respond to words of kindness and of truth. H.P. Blavatsky

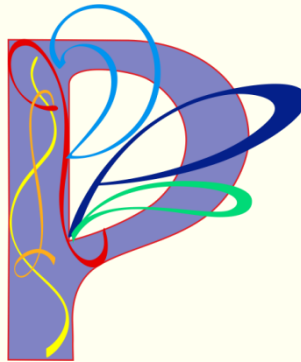
What else do you expect *us agnams* to do?<sup>1</sup> Are we not rather to be blamed already, that we undertake such work, for which we — *not* being Buddhas, nor even Bodhisattvas — are as badly qualified as a recruit is fit to serve as general field-marshal. And if you cannot find fault with us, can you say that those “yogis” or “saints” whom you seem to blame in your above passage, were in a better position and could have done more? If, however, they were, *what* ought they to have done?

We are fully aware that a true Buddhist and a sage, or — if you like [354] — theosophist, must always be every inch an *altruist*. And when we are acting altruistically, it is perhaps no bad sign in regard to what we some day might *become*; but everything at its proper time: where competency does not keep pace with altruism in development and in display, it might do more harm than good. Thus we feel even not quite sure whether our conscience ought not to blame us for our well-intended, but pert work; and the only excuse we can find for our thus giving way to the promptings of our heart is, that those persons who really might be properly qualified, do *not* come forward, do not help us, do *not do* this evidently necessary work!<sup>2</sup>

Yours respectfully,

HÜBBE-SCHLEIDEN

Neuhausen, *Munich*, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1889



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<sup>1</sup> We expect you not to regard everyone else as an “*agnam*” — *if* by this word an *ignoramus* is meant. To help to deliver the world from the curse of *Avidyā* (ignorance) we have only to learn from those who know more than we do, and teach those who know less. This is just the object we have in view in spreading theosophical literature and trying to explain “Indian *religio-philosophy*.” H.P. Blavatsky

<sup>2</sup> An apocalyptic utterance this. I think, however, that I dimly understand. Those who are “properly qualified, do *not* come forward, do *not* help us, do *not do* this evidently necessary work.” Don’t THEY? How *does* our pessimistic correspondent *know*? I “guess” and “surmise” that they do, and very much so. For had the T.S. and its members been left to their own fate and Karma, there would not be much of it left today, under the relentless persecutions, slander, scandals, purposely set on foot, and the malicious hatred of our enemies — *open* and *secret*. — H.P. Blavatsky.