

*Misconceptions about
Buddhism corrected*



Individual or personal existence is the cause of pains and sorrows; collective and impersonal life-eternal is full of divine bliss and joy for ever; neither causes nor effects can darken its light.

From *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (A FEW MORE MISCONCEPTIONS CORRECTED) XIV pp. 432-42

NOTWITHSTANDING WIDESPREAD MISCONCEPTIONS AND ERRORS — often most amusing to one who has a certain knowledge of the true doctrines — about Buddhism generally, and especially about Buddhism in Tibet, all the Orientalists agree that the Buddha’s foremost aim was to lead human beings to salvation by teaching them to practice the greatest purity and virtue, and by detaching them from the service of this illusionary world, and the love of one’s still more illusionary — because so evanescent and unreal — body and physical self. And what is the good of a virtuous life, full of privations and suffering, if the only result of it is to be annihilation at the end? If even the attainment of that supreme perfection which leads the Initiate to remember the whole series of his past lives, and to foresee that of the future ones, by the full development of that inner, divine eye in him, and to acquire the knowledge that unfolds the causes¹ of the ever-recurring cycles of existence, brings him finally to non-being, and nothing more — then the whole system is idiotic, and Epicureanism is far more philosophical than *such* Buddhism. He who is unable to comprehend the subtle, and yet so potent, difference between existence in a material or physical state and a purely spiritual existence — Spirit or “Soul-life” — will never appreciate at their full value the grand teachings of the Buddha, even in their exoteric form. Individual or personal existence is the cause of pains and sorrows; collective and impersonal life-eternal is full of divine bliss and joy for ever, with neither causes nor effects to darken its light. And the hope for such a life-eternal is the keynote of the whole of Buddhism. If we are told that impersonal existence is no existence at all, but amounts to annihilation, as was maintained by some French reincarnationists, then we would ask: What difference can it make in the spiritual perceptions of an Ego whether he enter Nirvāna loaded with the recollections only of his own personal lives — tens of thousands according to the modern reincarnationists — or whether merged entirely in the Parabrahmic state, it becomes one with the All, with the absolute knowledge and the absolute feeling of representing collective humanities? Once that an Ego lives only ten distinct individual lives he must necessarily lose his one self, and become mixed up — merged, so to say — with these ten selves. It really seems that so long as this great mystery remains a dead letter to the world of Western thinkers, and especially to the Orientalists, the less the latter undertake to explain it, the better for Truth.

¹ The twelve Nidānas, called in Tibetan Ten-brel Chug-nyi, which are based upon the “Four Truths.”

Of all the existing religious Philosophies, Buddhism is the least understood. The Lassens, Webers, Wassilyev, the Burnoufs and Juliens, and even such “eye-witnesses” of Tibetan Buddhism as Csoma de Körös and the Schlagintweits, have hitherto only added perplexity to confusion. None of these has ever received his information from a genuine Gelugpa source: all have judged Buddhism from the bits of knowledge picked up at Tibetan frontier lamaseries, in countries thickly populated by Bhutaneses and Lepchas, Böns, and red-capped Dugpas, along the line of the Himālayas. Hundreds of volumes purchased from Buriats, Shamans, and Chinese Buddhists, have been read and translated, glossed and misinterpreted according to invariable custom. Esoteric Schools would cease to be worthy of their name were their literature and doctrines to become the property of even their profane co-religionists — still less of the Western public. This is simple common sense and logic. Nevertheless this is a fact which our Orientalists have ever refused to recognize: hence they have gone on, gravely discussing the relative merits and absurdities of idols, “soothsaying tables,” and “magical figures of Phurbu” on the “square tortoise.” None of these have anything to do with the real philosophical Buddhism of the Gelugpa, or even of the most educated among the Sakyapa and Kadampa sects. All such “plates” and sacrificial tables, Chinsreg magical circles, etc., were avowedly got from Sikkim, Bhutan, and Eastern Tibet, from Böns and Dugpas. Nevertheless, these are given as characteristics of Tibetan Buddhism! It would be as fair to judge the unread Philosophy of Bishop Berkeley after studying Christianity in the clown-worship of Neapolitan *lazzaroni*, dancing a mystic jig before the idol of St. Pip, or carrying the *ex-voto* in wax of the phallus of SS. Cosmo and Domiano, at Tsernie.

It is quite true that the primitive Śrāvakas (listeners or hearers) and the Śramanas (the “thought-restrainers” and the “pure”) have degenerated, and that many Buddhist sects have fallen into mere dogmatism and ritualism. Like every other Esoteric, half-suppressed teaching, the words of the Buddha convey a double meaning, and every sect has gradually come to claim to be the only one knowing the correct meaning, and thus to assume supremacy over the rest. Schism has crept in, and has fastened, like a hideous cancer, on the fair body of early Buddhism. Nāgārjuna’s Mahāyāna (“Great Vehicle”) School was opposed by the Hīnayāna (or “Little Vehicle”) System, and even the Yogacharyā of Āryāsanga became disfigured by the yearly pilgrimage from India to the shores of Mānasarovara, of hosts of vagabonds with matted locks who play at being Yogīns and Fakirs, preferring this to work. An affected detestation of the world, and the tedious and useless practice of the counting of inhalations and exhalations as a means to produce absolute tranquillity of mind or meditation, have brought this school within the region of Hatha-Yoga, and have made it heir to the Brāhmanical Tīrthikas. And though its Srotāpatti, its Sakridāgāmin, Anāgāmin, and Arhats,¹ bear the same names in almost every school, yet the doctrines of each differ greatly, and none of these is likely to gain real Abhijñās (the supernatural abnormal five powers).

¹ The Srotāpatti is one who has attained the *first* Path of comprehension in the real and the unreal; the Sakridāgāmin is the candidate for one of the higher Initiations: “one who is to receive birth once more”; the Anāgāmin is he who has attained the “third Path,” or literally, “he who will not be reborn again” *unless he so wishes it*, having the option of being reborn in any of the “worlds of the Gods,” or of remaining in Devachan, or of choosing an earthly body with a philanthropic object. An Arhat is one who has reached the highest Path; he may merge into Nirvāna at will, while here on earth.

One of the chief mistakes of the Orientalists when judging on “internal (?) evidence,” as they express it, was that they assumed that the Pratyeka-Buddhas, the Bodhisattvas, and the “Perfect” Buddhas were a later development of Buddhism. For on these three chief degrees are based the seven and twelve degrees of the Hierarchy of Adeptship. The first are those who have attained the Bodhi (wisdom) of the Buddhas, but do not become Teachers. The human Bodhisattvas are candidates, so to say, for perfect Buddhahood (in Kalpas to come), and with the option of using their powers now if need be. “Perfect” Buddhas are simply “perfect” Initiates. All these are men, and not disembodied Beings, as is given out in the Hīnayāna exoteric books. Their correct character may be found only in the secret volumes of Lugrub or Nāgārjuna, the founder of the Mahāyāna system, who is said to have been initiated by the Nāgas (fabulous “Serpents,” the veiled name for an Initiate or Mahatma). The fabled report found in Chinese records that Nāgārjuna considered his doctrine to be in opposition to that of Gautama Buddha, until he discovered from the Nāgas that it was precisely the doctrine that had been secretly taught by Śākyamuni Himself, is an allegory, and is based upon the reconciliation between the old Brāhmanical secret Schools in the Himālayas and Gautama’s Esoteric teachings, both parties having at first objected to the rival schools of the other. The former, the parent of all others, had been established beyond the Himālayas for ages before the appearance of Śākyamuni. Gautama was a pupil of this; and it was with them, those Indian Sages, that He had learned the truths of the Śūnyatā, the emptiness and impermanence of every terrestrial, evanescent thing, and the mysteries of Prajñā-Pāramitā, or “knowledge across the River,” which finally lands the “Perfect One” in the regions of the One Reality. But His Arhats were not Himself. Some of them were ambitious, and they modified certain teachings after the great councils, and it is on account of these “heretics” that the Mother-School at first refused to allow them to blend their schools, when persecution began driving away the Esoteric Brotherhood from India. But when finally most of them submitted to the guidance and control of the chief Āśramas, then the Yogacharyā of Āryāsanga was merged into the oldest Lodge. For it is *there* from time immemorial that has lain concealed the final hope and light of the world, the salvation of mankind. Many are the names of that School and land, the name of the latter being now regarded by the Orientalists as the mythic name of a fabulous country. It is from this mysterious land nevertheless, that the Hindu expects his Kalki-Avatāra, the Buddhist his Maitreya, the Parsī his Saoshyant and the Jew his Messiah, and so would the Christian expect thence his Christ — if he only knew of it.

There, and there alone, reigns Parinishpanna (Yong-Grüb), the absolutely perfect comprehension of Being and Non-Being, the changeless true Existence in Spirit, even while the latter is seemingly still in the body, every inhabitant thereof being a Non-Ego because he has become the Perfect Ego. Their voidness is “self-existent and perfect” — if there were profane eyes to sense and perceive it — because it has become absolute; the unreal being transformed into conditionless Reality, and the realities of this, our world, having vanished in their own nature into thin (non-existing) air. The “Absolute Truth” (Don-dampa’i-den pa; Sanskrit: Paramārthasatya), having conquered “relative truth” (Kun zab chi-den pa; Sanskrit: Samvritisatya), the inhabitants of the mysterious region are thus supposed to have reached the state called in mystic phraseology Svasamvedanā (“self-analysing reflection”) and Paramārtha, or that ab-

solute consciousness of the personal merged into the impersonal Ego, which is above all, hence above illusion in every sense. Its “Perfect” Buddhas and Bodhisattvas may be on every nimble Buddhist tongue as celestial — therefore unreachable Beings, while these names may suggest and say nothing to the dull perceptions of the European profane. What matters it to Those who, being in this world, yet live outside and far beyond our illusive earth! Above Them there is but one class of Nirvānīs, namely, the Cho-ku (Dharmakāya), or the Nirvānīs “without remains” — the pure Arūpa, the formless Breaths.¹

Thence emerge occasionally the Bodhisattvas in their Tulpa’i-Ku (or Nirmānakāya) body and, assuming an ordinary appearance, they teach men. There are conscious, as well as unconscious, incarnations.

Most of the doctrines contained in the Yogacharyā, or Mahāyāna systems are Esoteric, like the rest. One day the profane Hindu and Buddhist may begin to pick the *Bible* to pieces, taking it literally. Education is fast spreading in Asia, and already there have been made some attempts in this direction, so that the tables may then be cruelly turned on the Christians. Whatever conclusions the two may arrive at, they will never be half as absurd and unjust as some of the theories launched by Christians against their respective Philosophies. Thus, according to Spence Hardy, at death the Arhat enters Nirvāna:

That is, he ceases to exist.²

And, agreeably to Major Jacob, the Jīvanmukta,

Absorbed into Brahma, enters upon an unconscious and stonelike existence.³

Śamkarāchārya is shown as saying in his prolegomena to the *Śvetaśvatara Upanishad*:

Gnosis, once arisen, requires nothing farther for the realization of its result: it needs *subsidia* only that it may arise.

The Theosophist, it has been argued, as long as he lives, may do good and evil as he chooses, and incur no stain, such is the efficacy of gnosis. And it is further alleged that the doctrine of Nirvāna lends itself to immoral inferences, and that the Quietists of all ages have been taxed with immortality.⁴

¹ It is an erroneous idea which makes the Orientalists take literally the teaching of the Mahāyāna School about the three different kinds of bodies, namely, the Tul-pa’i-Ku, the Long-chod-Dzog-pa’i-Ku, and the Cho-Ku, as all pertaining to the Nirvānic condition. There are two kinds of Nirvāna: the earthly, and that of the purely disembodied Spirits. These three “bodies” are the three envelopes — all more or less physical — which are at the disposal of the Adept who has entered and crossed the six Pāramitās, or “Paths” of Buddha. Once He enters upon the seventh, He can return no more to earth. [See Csoma, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1st series, Vol. VII (1838), p. 142ff; and Schott, *Buddhismus*, p. 9, who give it otherwise. Cited on p. 38 of Schlagintweit’s *Buddhism in Tibet*.]

² [See *A Manual of Buddhism*, p. 39 of an offset reprint of the 1853 ed. in: *The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies Series*, Vol. LVI, Varanasi, 1967.]

³ *Vedānta-Sāra*, tr. by Major Jacob, p. 119

⁴ *op. cit.*, p. 122

According to Wassilyev¹ and Csoma de Körös:²

The Prasanga school obtained its name from the peculiar mode which it adopted of deducing the absurdity and erroneousness of every esoteric opinion.³

Correct interpretations of Buddhist Philosophy are crowned by that gloss on a thesis from the Prasanga School, that

Even an Arhat goes to hell in case he doubt anything,⁴

thus making of the most free-thinking religion in the world a blind-faith system. The “threat” refers simply to the well-known law that even an Initiate may fail, and thus have his object utterly ruined, if he doubt for one moment the efficacy of his psychic powers — the alphabet of Occultism, as every Kabbalist well knows.

The Tibetan sect of the Ngo-vo-nyid-med par Mraba (“they who deny existence,” or “regard nature as Māyā”)⁵ can never be contrasted for one moment with some of the nihilistic or materialistic schools of India, such as the Chārvāka. They are pure Vedāntins — if anything — in their views. And if the Yogacharyās may be compared with, or called the Tibetan Viśishtādvaitins, the Prasanga School is surely the Advaita Philosophy of the land. It was divided into two: one was originally founded by Bhāvaviveka, the Svātantrika Mādhyamika School, and the other by Buddhapālita; both have their exoteric and esoteric divisions. It is necessary to belong to the latter to know anything of the esoteric doctrines of that sect, the most metaphysical and philosophical of all. Chandrakirti (Dava Dagpa) wrote his commentaries on the Prasanga doctrines and taught publicly; and he expressly states that there are two ways of entering the “Path” to Nirvāna. Any virtuous man can reach by Naljor-ngonsum (“meditation by self-perception”), the intuitive comprehension of the four Truths, without either belonging to a monastic order or having been initiated. In this case it was considered as a heresy to maintain that the visions which may arise in consequence of such meditation, or Vijñāna (internal knowledge),⁶ are not susceptible of errors (Namtog or false visions), for they are. Ālaya alone having an absolute and eternal existence, can alone have absolute knowledge; and even the Initiate, in his Nirmānakāya⁷ body may commit an occasional mistake in accepting the false for the true in his explorations of the “Causeless” World. The Dharmakāya Bodhisattva is alone infallible, when in real Samādhi. Ālaya, or Nying-po, being the root and basis of all, invisible and incomprehensible to human eye and intellect, it can reflect only its reflection — not Itself. Thus that reflection will be mirrored like the moon in tran-

¹ *Der Buddhismus*, pp. 327, 357, et seq., quoted by Schlagintweit. (See pp. 41-45)

² *Buddhism in Tibet*, p. 41

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 44

⁵ They maintain also the existence of One Absolute pure Nature, Parabrahman; the illusion of everything outside of it; the leading of the individual Soul — a Ray of the “Universal” — into the true nature of existence and things by Yoga alone.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 44

⁷ Nirmānakāya (also Nirvānakāya, vulg.) is the body or Self “with remains,” or the influence of terrestrial attributes, however spiritualized, clinging yet to that Self. An Initiate in Dharmakāya, or in Nirvāna “without remains,” is the Jīvanmukta, the Perfect Initiate, who separates his Higher Self entirely from his body during Samādhi.

quill and clear water only in the passionless Dharmakāya intellect, and will be distorted by the flitting image of everything perceived in a mind that is itself liable to be disturbed.

In short, this doctrine is that of the Rāja-Yoga in its practice of the two kinds of the Samādhi state; one of the “Paths” leading to the sphere of bliss (Sukhāvātī or Devachan), where man enjoys perfect, unalloyed happiness, but is yet still connected with personal existence; and the other the Path that leads to entire emancipation from the worlds of illusion, self, and unreality. The first one is open to all and is reached by merit simply; the second — a hundredfold more rapid — is reached through knowledge (Initiation). Thus the followers of the Prasanga School are nearer to Esoteric Buddhism than are the Yogacharyās; for their views are those of the most secret Schools, and only the echo of these doctrines is heard in the [texts by] Jam-yang-shay-ba¹ and other works in public circulation and use. For instance, the unreality of two out of the three divisions of time is given in public works, namely

That there is neither past nor future, both of these divisions being correlative to the present; and

That the reality of things can never be sensed or perceived except by him who has obtained the Dharmakāya body;

here again is a difficulty, since this body “without remains” carries the Initiate to full Parinirvāna, if we accept the exoteric explanation verbally, and can therefore neither sense nor perceive. But evidently our Orientalists do not feel the *caveat* in such incongruities, and they proceed to speculate without pausing to reflect over it. Literature on Mysticism being enormous, and Russia, owing to the free intercourse with the Buriats, Shamans, and Mongolians, having alone purchased whole libraries on Tibet, scholars ought to know better by this time. It suffices to read, however, what Csoma wrote on the origin of the Kāla Chakra System,² or Wassilyev on Buddhism, to make one give up every hope of seeing them go below the rind of the “forbidden fruit.” When Schlagintweit is found saying that Tibetan Mysticism is not Yoga,

. . . [that] abstract devotion by which supernatural powers are acquired,³

as Yoga is defined by Wilson, but that it is closely related to Siberian Shamanism, and is “almost identical with the Tāntrika ritual”; and that the Tibetan *Zung* is the “*Dhāranīs*,” and the *Gyut* only the *Tantras* — pre-Christian Tantra being judged by the ritual of the modern Tāntrikas — one seems almost justified in suspecting our materialistic Orientalists of acting as the best friends and allies of the missionaries. Whatever is not known to our geographers seems to be a non-existent locality. Thus:

Mysticism . . . is reported to have originated in the fabulous country Śambhala. . . . Csoma, from *careful* investigations, places this [fabulous?] country beyond the Sir Deriáu [Yaxartes] between 45° and 50° north latitude. It was first known

¹ [H.P. Blavatsky is possibly referring to his textbook *Great Exposition of the Tenets*; commented on and partially translated by Jeffrey Hopkins in his *Meditation on Emptiness*, London, Wisdom Pubs., 1983. — *Dara Eklund*.]

² The “Sacred” Books of Dus-Kyi Khorlo (“Time Circle”). See *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. II, 1833, pp. 57-59. These works were abandoned to the Sikkim Duggas, from the time of Tsong-kha-pa’s reform.

³ *Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms* (in an article on “Yoga” by H.W. Wilson) quoted in *Buddhism in Tibet*, p. 47

in India in the year 965 A.D.; and it was introduced . . . into Tibet from India, *via* Kashmir, in the year 1025 A.D.¹

“It” meaning the “Dus-kyi Khorlo,” or Tibetan Mysticism. A system as old as man, known in India and practised before Europe had become a continent, “Was first known,” we are told, only nine or ten centuries ago! The text of its books in its present form may have “originated” even later, for there are numerous such texts that have been tampered with by sects to suit the fancies of each. But who has read the original book on Dus-Kyi Khorlo, re-written by Tsong-kha-pa, with his Commentaries? Considering that this grand Reformer burnt every book on Sorcery on which he could lay his hands in 1387, and that he has left a whole library of his own works — not a tenth part of which has ever been made known — such statements as those above quoted are, to say the least, premature. The idea is also cherished — from a happy hypothesis, offered by Abbé Huc — that Tsong-kha-pa derived his wisdom and acquired his extraordinary powers from his intercourse with a stranger from the West, “remarkable for a long nose.” This stranger is believed by the good Abbé “to have been a European missionary”; hence the remarkable resemblance of the religious ritual in Tibet to the Roman Catholic service. The sanguine “Lama of Jehovah” does not say, however, who were the five foreigners who appeared in Tibet in the year 381 of our era, to disappear as suddenly and mysteriously as they came, after leaving with King Thothori-Nyan-tsan instructions how to use certain things in a casket that “had fallen from heaven” in his presence precisely fifty years before, or in the year A.D. 331.²

There is generally a hopeless confusion about Eastern dates among European scholars, but nowhere is this so great as in the case of Tibetan Buddhism. Thus, while some, correctly enough, accept the seventh century as the date of the introduction of Buddhism, there are others — such as Lassen and Koepfung, for instance — who show on good authority, the one, the construction of a Buddhist monastery on the slopes of the Kailāsa Range so far back as the year 137 B.C.,³ and the other, Buddhism established in and north of the Punjab, as early as the year 292 B.C. The difference though trifling — only just one thousand years — is nevertheless puzzling. But even this is easily explained on Esoteric grounds. Buddhism — the veiled Esotericism of Buddha — was established and took root in the seventh century of the Christian era; while true Esoteric Buddhism, or the kernel, the very spirit of Tathāgata’s doctrines, was brought to the place of its birth, the cradle of humanity, by the chosen Arhats of Buddha, who were sent to find for it a secure refuge, as

The Sage had perceived the dangers ever since he had entered upon Thonglam (“the Path of seeing,” or clairvoyance).⁴

¹ *Buddhism in Tibet*, pp. 47, 48

² *ibid.*, pp. 63, 64. The objects found in the casket, as enumerated in the exoteric legend, are of course symbolical. They may be found mentioned in the *Kanjur*. They were said to be: (1) two hands joined; (2) a miniature Chorten (Stūpa, or reliquary); (3) a talisman with “Om mani padme hūm” inscribed on it; (4) a religious book, *Zamatog* (“A constructed vehicle”).

³ *Alterthumskunde*, ii. 1072

⁴ [The third of five stages on the Path. See pp. 104-19 of *The Opening of the Wisdom Eye*, by Tenzin Gyatsho, the XIVth Dalai Lama. Wheaton Theosophical Publishing House, 1972. — *Dara Eklund*.]

Amidst populations deeply steeped in Sorcery the attempt proved a failure; and it was not until the School of the “Doctrine of the Heart” had merged with its predecessor, established ages earlier on the slope facing Western Tibet, that Buddhism was finally engrafted, with its two distinct Schools—the Esoteric and the exoteric divisions — in the land of the Bon-pa.¹



¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings, (A FEW MORE MISCONCEPTIONS CORRECTED) XIV pp. 432-42*