

*Godless Buddhism is
highly philosophical
and logical agnosticism*



Abstract and train of thoughts¹

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Where is the necessity for imposing our personal views upon others who must be allowed to possess as good a faculty of discrimination and judgment as we believe ourselves to be endowed with?

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[Babu Raj Narain Bose, 1826–1899, a well-known Brahmo-Samājist, wrote an article on “The Essential Religion” in the pages of the *Tatva Bodhini Patrika*. His call is for the highest virtues and a life of selflessness, irrespective of religious affiliation. H.P. Blavatsky, while strongly endorsing most of what he says, makes the following comments upon various points in Bose’s article:]

These are as noble and as conciliating words as were ever pronounced among the Brahmos of India. They would be calculated to do a world of good, but for the common doom of words of wisdom to become the “voice crying in the desert.” Yet even in these kindly uttered sentences, so full of benevolence and good will to all men, we cannot help discerning (we fervently hope, that Babu Rajnarain Bose [494] will pardon our honest sincerity) a ring of a certain sectarian, hence selfish feeling, one against which our Society is forced to fight so desperately.

We should tolerate all religions, though at the same time *propagating the religion which we consider to be true*,

— we are told. It is our painful duty to analyse these words, and we begin by asking *why* should we? Where is the necessity for imposing our own *personal* views, our beliefs *pro tem*, if we may use the expression, upon other persons who, each and all must be allowed to possess — until the contrary is shown — as good a faculty of discrimination and judgment as we believe ourselves to be endowed with? We say belief *pro tem* basing the expression upon the writer’s own confession. He tells his readers:

We are apt to forget that *we ourselves are not infallible*, that our opinions . . . *were not exactly the same twenty years ago as they are now, nor will they be exactly the same twenty years hence*, [and] . . . *that all the members of our own sect or party . . . do not hold exactly the same opinions on all subjects concerning religion as we do*.

Precisely. Then why not leave the mind of our brothers of other religions and creeds to pursue its own natural course instead of forcibly diverting it — however gentle the persuasion — into a groove we may ourselves abandon twenty years hence? But, we may be perhaps reminded by the esteemed writer that in penning those sentences which we have italicised, he referred but to the “non-essential points” — or sectarian dogmas, and not to what he is pleased to call the “essential” points of religion, viz. belief in God or theism. We answer by enquiring again, whether the latter tenet — a tenet being something which has to rest upon its own intrinsic value and undeniable evidence — whether notwithstanding, until very lately its quasi-universal acceptance — this tenet is any better proven, or rests upon any firmer foundation than any of the existing dogmas which are admitted by none but those who accept the authority they proceed from? Are not in this case, both tenet and dogmas, the “essentials” as the “non-essentials,” simply the respective conclusions and the outcome of “fallible minds”? And can it be maintained that theism itself with its present crude ideas about an intelligent personal [495] deity — a little better than a superhumanly conscious big man — will not 20 years hence have reached not only a broader and more

noble aspect, but even a decided turning point which will lead humanity to a far higher ideal in consequence of the scientific truths it acquires daily and almost hourly?

It is difficult to obliterate innate differences of mental perceptions and faculties, let alone to reconcile them by bringing under one standard the endless varieties of human nature and thought.

It is from a strictly agnostic platform that we are now arguing, basing what we say merely upon the writer's own words. And we maintain that the major premise of his general proposition which may be thus formulated — “a personal God *is* — while dogmas may or may not be true” — being simply admitted, never *proven*, since the existence of God in general was, is, and ever will remain an *unprovable* proposition, his conclusions, however correctly derived from the minor or second premiss, do not cover the whole ground. The syllogism is regular and the reasoning valid — only *in the opinion of the theists*. The atheist as the agnostic will protest, having logic as well as reason on his side. He will say:

Why not accord to others that which you claim for yourselves?

However weighty our arguments and *gentle* our persuasion, no theist would fail to feel hurt were we to try our hand in persuading him to throw away his theism and accept the religion or philosophy “which *we* consider to be true” — namely, “godless” Buddhism, or highly philosophical and logical agnosticism. As our esteemed contemporary puts it

. . . it is impossible to obliterate differences of face and make all faces exactly resemble each other.

Has the idea ever struck him that it is as difficult to entirely obliterate differences of mental perceptions and faculties, let alone to reconcile by bringing them under one standard the endless varieties of human nature and thought? The latter may be forced from its natural into an artificial channel. But like a mask however securely stuck on one's face, and which is liable to be torn off by the first strong gust of wind that blows under, the convictions thus artificially inoculated are liable at any day to resume their natural course — the new cloth put upon the old garment torn out, and “the rent made worse.”

No attempt toward engrafting our views and beliefs on individuals, whose mental and intellectual capacities differ from ours as one variety or species of plants differs from another, will ever be successful.

Nor we will ever be able prove our love to man by depriving him of his divine prerogative, that of an untrammelled liberty of reason, right of conscience, and self-reliance.

We are with those who think that as nature has never intended the process known in horticulture as engrafting, so [496] she has never meant that the ideas of *one* man should be inoculated with those of any other man, since, were it so, she would have — if really guided by intelligence — created all the faculties of human mind, as all plants, homogeneous, which is not the case. Hence, as no kind of plant can be induced to grow and thrive artificially upon another plant which does not belong to the

same natural order, so no attempt toward engrafting our views and beliefs on individuals whose mental and intellectual capacities differ from ours as one variety or species of plants differs from another variety — will ever be successful. The missionary efforts directed for several hundred years toward Christianising the natives of India, is a good instance in hand and illustrates the inevitable failure following every such fallacious attempt. Very few among those natives upon whom the process of engrafting succeeded, have any real merit; while the tendency of the great majority is to return to its original specific types, that of a true born pantheistic Hindu, clinging to his forefather's caste and gods as a plant clings to its original genus.

Love of God and love of man is the essence of religion,

says Babu Raj Narain Bose elsewhere, inviting men to withdraw their attention from the husk of religion — “the non-essentials” and concentrate it upon the kernel — its essentials. We doubt whether we will ever prove our love to man by depriving him of a fundamental and essential prerogative, that of an untrammelled and entire liberty of his thoughts and conscience.

The religion of love and charity is built upon the gigantic holocaust of the faithful, fuelled by the illegitimate desire to impose a universal belief in Christ.

Where is that creed that has ever surpassed it in bloodthirstiness and cruelty, in intolerance, in papal bulls, and the damnation of all other religions?

Moreover in saying, as the author does further on:

Nothing has done so much mischief to the world as religious bigotry and dogmatism on non-essential points of religion; nothing has led so much to bloody wars and fiery persecutions as the same . . .

— he turns the weapon of logic and fact against his own argument. What religion, for instance, ever claimed more than Christianity “love of God and love of man” — aye, “love of all men as our brothers”; and yet where is that creed that has ever surpassed it in bloodthirstiness and cruelty, in intolerance, to the damnation of all other religions!

What crimes has it [Religion in general] not committed?

exclaims Prof. Huxley quoting from Lucretius, and he adds, referring to Christianity:

. . . what [497] cruelties have been perpetrated in the name of Him who said “Love your enemies; blessed are the peacemakers,” and so many other noble things.

Truly this religion of Love and Charity is now built upon the most gigantic holocaust of victims, the fruits of the unlawful, sinful desire to bring over all men to one mode of thinking, at any rate to one “essential” point in their religion — belief in Christ.

Genuine morality does not rest with the profession of any particular creed or faith, least of all with belief in gods or a God.

However sincere and ardent the faith of a theist, unless he gives precedence in his thoughts first to the benefit that accrues from a moral course of action to his brother, and then only thinks of himself, he will remain at best a pious egotist.

We admit and recognize fully that it is the duty of every honest man to try to bring round by “argument and gentle persuasion” every man who errs with respect to the “essentials” of Universal ethics, and the usually recognized standard of morality. But the latter is the common property of *all* religions, as of *all* the honest men, irrespective of their beliefs. The principles of the true moral code, tried by the standard of right and justice, are recognized as fully, and followed just as much by the honest atheist as by the honest theist, religion and piety having, as can be proved by statistics, very little to do with the repression of vice and crime. A broad line has to be drawn between the external practice of one’s moral and social duties, and that of the real intrinsic virtue practised but for its own sake. Genuine morality does not rest with the profession of any particular creed or faith, least of all with belief in gods or a God; but it rather depends upon the degree of our own individual perceptions of its direct bearing upon human happiness in general, hence — upon our own personal weal. But even this is surely not all.

“So long as man is taught and allowed to believe that he must be just, that the strong hand of law may not punish him, or his neighbour take his revenge”;

- That he must be enduring because complaint is useless and weakness can only bring contempt;
- That he must be temperate,
- That *his* health may keep good and all his appetites retain their acuteness; and, he is told
- That, if he serves *his* right, his friends may serve him, if he defends his country, he defends himself, and that by serving his God he prepares for himself an eternal life of happiness hereafter;

— so long, we say, as he acts on such principles, virtue is *no virtue*, but verily the culmination of SELFISHNESS. However sincere and [498] ardent the faith of a theist, unless, while conforming his life to what he pleases to term *divine* laws, he gives precedence in his thoughts first to the benefit that accrues from such a moral course of actions *to his brother*, and then only thinks of himself — he will remain at best — a pious egotist; and we do claim that belief in, and fear of God in man, is chiefly based upon, develops and grows in exact proportion to his selfishness, his fear of punishment and bad results only for himself, without the least concern for his brother.

We see daily that the theist, although defining morality as the conformity of human actions to *divine* laws, is not a little more moral than the average atheist or infidel who regards a moral life simply the duty of every honest right-thinking man without giving a thought to any reward for it in after-life. The apparently discrepant fact that one who disbelieves in his survival after death should, nevertheless, frame in most

cases his life in accordance with the highest rules of morality, is not as abnormal as it seems at first. The atheist, knowing of but one existence, is anxious to leave the memory of his life as unsullied as possible in the after-remembrances of his family and posterity, and *in honour even with those yet unborn*. In the words of the Greek Stoic,

. . . though all our fellow men were swept away, and not a mortal *nor immortal* eye were left to approve or condemn, should we not here, within our breast, have a judge to dread, and a friend to conciliate?

Theism and atheism grow and develop together our reasoning powers, and become either fortified or weakened by reflection or deduction of evidence.

No more than theism is atheism congenite¹ with man. Both grow and develop in him together with his reasoning powers, and become either fortified or weakened by reflection and deduction of evidence from facts. In short both are entirely due to the degree of his emotional nature, and man is no more responsible for being an atheist than he is for becoming a theist. Both terms are entirely misunderstood.

Why should not men imagine that they can drink of the cup of vice with impunity when one half of the population is offered to purchase absolution for its sins for a paltry sum of money?

The more a child feels sure of his parents love for him, the easier he feels to break his father's commands. One ought to despise that virtue which prudence and fear alone direct.

Many are called impious not for having a worse but a different religion from their neighbours, says Epicurus. Mohammedans are stronger theists than the Christians, yet they are called "infidels" by the latter, and many theosophists are regarded as atheists, not for the denying of the Deity but for thinking somewhat peculiarly concerning this [499] ever-to-be unknown Principle. As a living contrast to the atheist, stands the theist believing in other lives or a life to come. Taught by his creed that prayer, repentance and offerings are capable of obliterating sin in the sight of the "all-forgiving, loving and merciful Father in Heaven," he is given every hope — the strength of which grows in proportion to the sincerity of his faith — that his sins will be remitted to him. Thus, the moral obstacle between the believer and sin is very weak, if we view it from the standpoint of human nature. The more a child feels sure of his parents love for him, the easier he feels it to break his father's commands. Who will dare to deny that the chief, if not the only cause of half the misery with which Christendom is afflicted — especially in Europe, the stronghold of sin and crime — lies not so much with human depravity as with its belief in the goodness and infinite mercy of "our Father in Heaven," and especially in the vicarious atonement? Why should not men imagine that they can drink of the cup of vice with impunity — at any rate, in its results in the hereafter — when one half of the population is offered to purchase absolution for its sins for a certain paltry sum of money, and the other has but to have faith in, and place reliance upon, Christ to secure a place in paradise

¹ [congenital, connate]

— though he be a murderer, starting for it right from the gallows! The public sale of indulgences for the perpetration of crime on the one hand, and the assurance made by the ministers of God that the consequences of the worst of sins may be obliterated by God at his will and pleasure, on the other, are quite sufficient, we believe, to keep crime and sin at the highest figure. He, who loves not virtue and good for their own sake and shuns not vice as vice, is sure to court the latter as a direct result of his pernicious belief. One ought to despise that virtue which prudence and fear alone direct.

We firmly believe, in the actuality, and the philosophical necessity of “Karma,” *i.e.*, in that law of unavoidable retribution, the not-to-be diverted effect of every cause produced by us, reward as punishment in strict conformity with our actions; and we maintain that since no one can be made responsible for another man’s religious beliefs with whom, and with which, he is not in the least concerned [500] — that perpetual craving for the conversion of all men we meet to our own modes of thinking and respective creeds becomes a highly reprehensible action.

We have no right to be influencing our neighbours’ opinions upon purely transcendental and unprovable questions, speculations of our emotional nature, for none of us is infallible. Opinions are never static: they are amenable to change by reason and experience.

With the exception of those above-mentioned cases of the universally recognized code of morality, the furtherance or neglect of which has a direct bearing upon human weal or woe, we have no right to be influencing our neighbours’ opinions upon purely transcendental and unprovable questions, the speculations of our emotional nature. Not because any of these respective beliefs are in any way injurious or bad *per se*; on the contrary, for every ideal that serves us as a point of departure and a guiding star in the path of goodness and purity, is to be eagerly sought for, and as unswervingly followed; but precisely on account of those differences and endless variety of human temperaments, so ably pointed out to us by the respected Brahmo gentleman in the lines as above quoted. For if, as he truly points out — none of us is infallible, and that “the religious opinions of men are subject to progress” (and change, as he adds), that progress being endless and quite likely to upset on any day our strongest convictions of the day previous; and that, as historically and daily proved, “nothing has done so much mischief” as the great variety of conflicting creeds and sects which have led but to bloody wars and persecutions, and the slaughter of one portion of mankind by the other, it becomes an evident and an undeniable fact that, by adding converts to those sects, we add but so many antagonists to fight and tear themselves to pieces, if not now then at no distant future. And in this case we do become responsible for their actions.

Propagandism and conversion, by stirring up religious hatred, are the fruitful seeds of cruelty and crimes against humanity.

Propagandism and conversion are the fruitful seeds sown for the perpetration of future crimes, the *odium theologicum*¹ stirring up religious hatreds — which relate as much to the “Essentials” as to the non-essentials of any religion — being the most fruitful as the most dangerous for the peace of mankind. In Christendom, where at each street corner starvation cries for help: where pauperism, and its direct result, vice and crime, fill the land with desolation — millions upon millions are annually spent upon this unprofitable and sinful work of proselytism. With that charming inconsistency which was ever the characteristic of the Christian churches, [501] the same Bishops who have opposed but a few decades back the building of railways, on the ground that it was an act of rebellion against God who willed that man should not go quite as quickly as the wind; and had opposed the introduction of the telegraphy, saying that it was a tempting of Providence; and even the application of anæsthetics in obstetrical cases, “under the pretence,” Prof. Draper tells us that

. . . it was an impious attempt to escape from the curse denounced against all women in *Genesis* iii, 16,

those same Bishops do not hesitate to meddle with the work of Providence when the “heathen” are concerned. Surely if Providence hath so decreed that women should be left to suffer for the sin of Eve, then it must have also willed that a man, born a heathen should be left one as — preordained. Are the missionaries wiser they think than their God, that they should try to correct his mistakes; and do they not also rebel against Providence, and its mysterious ways? But leaving aside things as dark to them as they are to us, and viewing “conversion,” so called, but from its practical aspect, we say that he, who under the dubious pretext that because something *is truth to him*, it must be truth also for everyone else, labours at the conversion of his neighbours, is simply engaged in the unholy work of breeding and raising future Cains.

Where is that wise and infallible man who can show to another man what or who should be his ideal?

Indeed, our “love of man” ought to be strong enough and sufficiently intuitional to stifle in us that spark of selfishness which is the chief motor in our desire to force upon our brother and neighbour our own religious opinions and views which we may “consider [for the time being] to be true.” It is a grand thing to have a worthy Ideal, but a still greater one to live up to it; and where is that wise and infallible man who can show, without fear of being mistaken, to another man what or who should be his ideal? If, as the theist assures us — “God is all in all” — then must he be in every ideal, whatever its nature, if it neither clashes with recognized morality, nor can it be shown productive of bad results. Thus, whether this Ideal be God, the pursuit of Truth, humanity collectively, or, as John Stuart Mill has so eloquently proved, simply our own country; and that in [502] the name of that ideal man not only works for it, but becomes better himself, creating thereby an example of morality and goodness for others to follow, what matters it to his neighbour whether this ideal be a chimeri-

¹ [theological hatred]

cal utopia, an abstraction, or even an inanimate object in the shape of an idol, or piece of clay?

The most fragrant rose has often the sharpest thorns. And it is the flowers of the thistle, when pounded and made up into an ointment, that will cure the wounds made by her cruel thorns the best.

For all its beauty, it is an ungrateful task to seek to engraft the rose upon the thistle, since the rose will lose its fragrance, and both plants their shapes, and become a monstrous hybrid.

Let us not meddle with the natural bent of man's religious or irreligious thought, any more than we should think of meddling with his private thoughts, lest, by so doing we should create more mischief than benefit, and deserve thereby his curses.

Were religions as harmless and as innocent as the flowers with which the author compares them, we would not have one word to say against them. Let every "gardener" attend but his own plants without forcing unasked his own variety upon those of other people, and all will remain satisfied. As popularly understood, Theism has, doubtless, its own peculiar beauty and may well seem "the most fragrant of flowers in the garden of religions" — to the ardent theist. To the atheist, however, it may possibly appear no better than a prickly thistle and the theist has no more right to take him to task for his opinion, than the atheist has to blame him for his horror of atheism. For all its beauty it is an ungrateful task to seek to engraft the rose upon the thistle, since in nine cases out of ten the rose will lose its fragrance, and both plants their shapes to become a monstrous hybrid. In the economy of nature everything is in its right place, has its special purpose, and the same potentiality for good as for evil in various degrees — if we will but leave it to its natural course. The most fragrant rose has often the sharpest thorns; and it is the flowers of the thistle when pounded and made up into an ointment that will cure the wounds made by her cruel thorns the best.

Theosophy is Religion itself. Loyalty to Truth is its creed. Virtue, morality, brotherly love, and kind sympathy with every living creature are its noble objectives.

In our humble opinion, the only "Essentials" in the Religion of Humanity are — virtue, morality, brotherly love, and kind sympathy with every living creature, whether human or animal. This is the common platform that our Society offers to all to stand upon; the most fundamental differences between religions and sects sinking into insignificance before the mighty problem of reconciling humanity, [503] of gathering all the various races into one family, and of bringing them all to a conviction of the utmost necessity in this world of sorrow to cultivate feelings of brotherly sympathy and tolerance, if not actually love.

Having taken for our motto:

In these Fundamentals — unity; in non-essentials — full liberty; in all things — charity,

we say to all collectively and to every one individually:

Keep to your forefather's religion, whatever it may be — if you feel attached to it, Brother; think with your own brains — if you have any; be by all means *yourself* — whatever you are, unless you are really a bad man. And remember above all, that a wolf in his own skin is immeasurably more honest than the same animal — under a sheep's clothing.

