

*Godless Buddhism
is highly philosophical
and logical agnosticism*



*Abstract and train of thoughts*¹

Madame Blavatsky on “The Essential Religion,” by Babu Raj Narain Bose.

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? 4

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. 5

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. 6

Nor we will ever be able prove our love to our fellow man by depriving him of his divine prerogatives — those of an untrammelled liberty of reason, right of conscience, and self-reliance. 6

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. 6

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? 6

Genuine morality does not rest with the profession of any particular creed or faith, least of all with belief in gods or a God. 7

No matter how 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 (if at all), he will remain at best a pious egotist. 7

Fie on that virtue which prudence alone directs!

Theism and atheism grow and develop together our reasoning powers, and become either fortified or weakened by reflection or deduction of evidence. 8

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? 9

¹ Title page illustration by Peter Dranitsin.

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. 9

We have therefore no right to be influencing our neighbours' opinions upon purely transcendental and unprovable questions, which are speculations of our emotional nature, for none of us is infallible. Opinions are never static: they are amenable to change by reason and experience. 10

By stirring up religious hatred, propagandism and conversion are the fertile seeds of cruelty and crimes against humanity. 10

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

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. 11

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, both plants will be deformed, and become a monstrous hybrid. 11

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. 12

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Madame Blavatsky on “The Essential Religion,” by Babu Raj Narain Bose.

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?

First published in *The Theosophist*, Vol. IV (9), June 1883, pp. 213-17. Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (A FEW THOUGHTS ON SOME WISE WORDS FROM A WISE MAN) IV pp. 493-503.

[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. be-

lief 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 innate 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 our fellow man by depriving him of his divine prerogatives — those 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.

No matter how 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 (if at all), 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.

Fie on that virtue which prudence alone directs!

- 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.¹ However sincere and ardent the faith of a theist, un-

¹ [Cf. *A Few Days in Athens*, being the translation of a Greek Manuscript discovered in Herculaneum, by Frances Wright. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, & Brown, 1822; pp. 70-71. — ED. PHIL.]

less, 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:

. . . thought 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?¹

No more than theism is atheism congenite 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.

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

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¹ [Quoting Cleanthes from *A Few Days in Athens*, p. 71. Wright's translation into English runs as follows:

"Thought though all my fellow men were swept away, and not a mortal nor immortal eye were left to approve or condemn — should I not here — within this breast, have a judge to dread, and a friend to conciliate?" — ED. PHIL.]

² [congenital, connate]

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 — 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 therefore no right to be influencing our neighbours' opinions upon purely transcendental and unprovable questions, which are 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.

By stirring up religious hatred, propagandism and conversion are the fertile 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, →

¹ [theological hatred]

— 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 chimerical 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, both plants will be deformed, 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.



Reply by Babu Raj Narain Bose.

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I HAVE READ YOUR ABLE, WISE. AND DISCRIMINATING REMARKS on my article in the *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, the Essential Religion, in the June Number of *The Theosophist* with the greatest attention. The great liberality of tone which marks those strictures does you much credit. I am sorry, however, that I cannot agree with you in all the opinions broached in your article. You have expressed yourself, in the same, as hostile to religious proselytization and conversion. Every man, who has a regard for the sanctity of truth must feel it his *duty* to propagate that which he considers to be true.¹ This holds good in religion as in all other branches of knowledge. It would show disregard for truth and would be a dereliction of *duty* if we do not propagate what we consider to be true and confine it to ourselves. You are of opinion that religion does not require to be propagated, it is a mere matter of emotion and human weal or woe does not depend upon it. Granting that it is a mere matter of emotion, does not emotion influence human conduct and thereby human weals or woes? Religion should therefore be propagated, but the propagation [96] should be made by means of argument and gentle persuasion, not using the least compulsion. Do not you, Theosophists, propagate your opinions which are of a semi-religious character and try to convert others to your views? Do you not impose your own personal views, to use your own words, upon people who do not believe occultism to be true and who disbelieve in the existence of spirit and a future world?² The opinion that God is impersonal is, I understand, your personal opinion and not that of the general body of Theosophists.³ Do you not try to impose this personal conviction of yours on others although it has little connection with Theosophy, or else why

¹ And since few of us have identical beliefs, and every religionist of whatever faith is firmly impressed with the truth and superiority of his own creed, with no regard whatsoever for the truths possibly contained in that of his brother — the result is, that sectarianism is kept ever alive, with no chance in it for mutual toleration — least of all, feelings of Brotherhood. There are many atheists in our Society, as deeply impressed with the correctness of their negations as our esteemed correspondent is with that of his affirmations. Would our atheists be welcome, or likely to be listened to, in the Brahma Mandirs? Then why claim for one what is refused to the other? There never was a time yet, when a Brahma preacher could not have had the chance to discourse before the Theosophical Society, upon Theism, nor ever one when the like courtesy has been given to Col. Olcott, or any other Theosophist speaker. For years, we lived near the Prarthana Samaj in Bombay, but its platform was ever closed for, and refused to us, even when asked for. — *Ed.* [H.P. Blavatsky]

² We can assure our correspondent that we do nothing of the kind. When challenged to give out our views, we do so, adding every time that they are our own *personal* views; and as such — since we do not believe ourselves infallible — are not to be taken as final truths. Instead of preaching our own religion, we implore everyone to first study his own and remain in it, whatever it is. Besides which, Theosophy is compatible with every religion, the world over. There were thaumaturgists in every creed, and mysticism has as much room in idolatrous as in monotheistic systems. Theosophy is the culmination and the practical demonstration of the *truths* underlying every creed. It requires but sincerity and a firm will in the application to the Essentials of any of them — whether they be Theism or Advaitism or even Atheism. Theosophy is simply the informing life of creed and of every religion and goes to prove their *raison d'être*, instead of their negation. — *Ed.* [H.P. Blavatsky]

³ [Selected Study Notes on "God" are listed at the end of this document. — ED. PHIL.]

do you return to the subject again and again in the columns of *The Theosophist*?¹ Propagandism and conversion you cannot avoid, but it must no doubt be made by gentle means. You say that religious propagandism carried in any way leads to bloody wars and fiery persecutions, but do not differences of opinion in matters of politics and science also lead sometimes to fiery persecution? There is need of tolerance in politics and science as in religion. Among persecutions in the province of science may be mentioned that of Homeopaths by Allopaths. What I meant to say in my article on Essential Religion [97] is that we should be tolerant of all forms of religious faith, but at the same time propagate our own individual views by means of argument and gentle persuasion. This certainly will not lead to bloody wars and fiery persecutions. If, after trying to convert others by such means, we fail, we should not be sorry. The Sanskrit proverb is if a man exerts and does not succeed, where is the blame?

You say in one place in your article:

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.²

Is religion a mere matter of emotion? You believe in the existence of an Eternal and All-pervading Principle, and you certainly consider its existence as a scientific truth. But science extends a little further. It includes the knowledge of that Principle as a Spirit, or in other words an Intelligent Being, and not only that but as a Perfect Spirit. I refer the reader to my views on this subject in my little treatise *The Science of Religion*. I can adduce the same sort of proof for the existence of a Perfect Spirit as you can do for that of an Eternal Principle.³

You are of opinion that religion does not influence the moral conduct of mankind. A few individual atheistic philosophers, such as Hume and Huxley, may not require belief in a God and future state to influence their moral conduct, but the mass of mankind does. Consider, for instance, the frightful mischief done to Society by the prevalence of Atheism at the time of the French Revolution, and which will no doubt be done by such prevalence among Nihilists, Socialists, [98] *et hoc genus omne*,⁴ in future, if those revolutionary classes ever gain predominance.⁵

¹ Denial of a *personal* god is no personal belief of ours, but that of all our Buddhist, Advaiti, Jain and Free-thinking members. We defend our position and welcome all others to do the same. — Ed. [H.P. Blavatsky]

² [See page 10 above.]

³ A "Perfect Spirit" is an abstraction, a *non-being*, and can have no *gunas* or attributes which alone make up the entity. Science has no "knowledge," we beg leave to state, of an "intelligent Being," a "Spirit" — not modern science at any rate. And the science of metaphysics rejects entirely the possibility of the Infinite having any conscious relation whatsoever with the finite. Moreover "Perfect Spirit" and "Eternal Principle" are synonyms and identical, and if both our esteemed correspondent and we are adducing proofs — one for the *Existence* (implying consciousness) and the other — for the *Presence* (implying unconsciousness or *absolute* consciousness, which is the same thing) it becomes a question between us to be decided by other and unbiased persons as to which of us is right and which wrong. — Ed. [H.P. Blavatsky]

⁴ [*i.e.*, and everything (else) of this kind.]

⁵ It will be a sufficient answer to draw our friend's attention to the revelation contained in the statistical tables given in the article "Suggestive Comparisons" in *The Theosophist* for June, 1883, page 217. They show that so

You maintain that the doctrine of *Karma* has a greater influence on human conduct than the doctrine of propitiation of God by repentance, but is the effect of *Karma* eternal? You certainly would not say so. You see then both of us agree in the opinion that punishment does not last for ever. What objection then can there be to believing that repentance is expiation for sin?¹ Granting for the sake of argument that God does not exist and depending only on nature, we see that when pain is short-lived in the universe, some provision must have been made by beneficent nature for the expiation of sin and the placing of man in a position in the future state leading to spiritual improvement and progress. I do not believe in the usual cant² of the day of nature, red with tooth and claw. Even if there were no God, there is clearly discernible a beneficent purpose running through the whole system of nature.³ [99]

I believe in the strong power of will, mesmerism and *yoga* powers as testified to by such authenticated cases as Runjeet Sing's Yogi and the Sunderban Yogi, and am an advocate of the cultivation of ancient Sanskrit learning. I am not therefore unfriendly to Theosophy, but I have a word of humble advice to offer to the disinterested leaders of the Theosophical movement, for whom I entertain every feeling of respect. The more they keep Theosophy and Theology distinct from each other, and the less they mix up their personal opinions on the subject of religion with their legitimate province, Theosophy, the better. I think it would be better for the cause of Theosophy if they do not discourse of their godless Buddhism, as they love to call it, before a nation so pre-eminently religious as the Hindus, a nation of devoted lovers of *Bhagawan* or God, Advaitism so often appealed to by yourself in questions of Theology being but Philosophy and not religion. There is a difference between philosophy and religion. Such discussion augurs ill for the ultimate success of Theosophy in this country. I am at a loss to understand why the leaders of the Theosophical movement preach Agnosticism and express deep sympathy with Atheism, and, in the same breath, deprecate the prevalence of atheism, scepticism, and materialism in this country. This appears quite mysterious to my humble self. I am perfectly disposed to tolerate Atheism, that is, abstain from persecuting Atheists in any shape whatever, since every man has a right to his own opinions, but there is a difference between toleration of Atheism and deep sympathy with it.

DEOGARH, E.I. Ry., 14th June 1883

far from an "irreligious belief," *i.e.*, free-thinking Agnosticism or Atheism being provocative of crime, the criminal offenses chargeable to this class were immeasurably less than those of the rough-going Orthodox Christians and Theists. It appears that of crimes to the 100,000 of population, 2,500 were of Catholics, 1,400 of Church of England members, 150 of Dissenters, and 5 of Infidels. *And*, to bring the thing nearer home, the recent census of Bombay shows that while among 408,680 Hindus, *idolaters* and *pantheists*, there were 18,950 criminals; there were 2,343 crimes committed among the 34,724 Christians and theists or 6.74 per cent of the whole *criminal offenses* — a much greater percentage than is shown by the class of pantheists and idolaters. — Ed. [H.P. Blavatsky]

¹ None whatever. But where is the necessity? — Ed. [H.P. Blavatsky]

² [Singing in a whining way, from the Latin *cantare*, to sing. Cant was at first a beggar's whine, hence hypocritical and sanctimonious talk, typically of a moral, religious, or political nature. Cf. W.W. Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary of English*, 1835-1912. — ED. PHIL.]

³ A pleasant expression, but highly optimistic. It is equivalent to affirming that although the moral law in nature may be offended, yet punishment is not logically inevitable. Penitence may take the place of expiation, and prayer restore the equilibrium of nature. The repentant culprit may go scot-free, but the victim or victims of his crime suffer its consequence without recompense! — Ed. [H.P. Blavatsky]

Editorial response by Madame Blavatsky.

Theology without the vital warmth of Theosophy is a corpse without life, a dry stick without sap.

BUDDHISM AND ADVAITISM — are as much religions as any theistic system. A religion does not necessarily imply the doctrine of a personal God or any kind of God in it. Religion, as every dictionary can show, comes from the Latin word *relegere*, to bind or collect together. Thus whether people pursue a common idea with, or without, a deity in it, if they are bound together by the same and one belief in something, that belief is a *religion*. Theology without the vital warmth of Theosophy is a corpse without life, a dry stick without sap. Theosophy blesses the world; Theology is its curse. Our whole endeavour is to test Theology by the theosophical *experimentum crucis*.¹ The affliction of India is, that it lost [100] Theosophy when the persecuted adepts had to fly beyond the mountains. And true religious living can never be again prevalent until their help is invoked to illumine the *Shastras*. Our Brother has had many years' experience of the hopelessness of converting India to even the benign form of theism which his *Adi Brahma Samaj* teaches. The saintly characters of Ram Mohun Roy, Debendra Nath Tagore, and a few others of his colleagues, have not won the Hindus from their exoteric worship — we think, because neither of them has had the Yogi power to prove *practically* the fact of there being a spiritual side to nature. If we hold so strongly to esoteric Buddhism and Advaitism, it is exactly because no religion can stand, save on the foundation of philosophy and science. No religion can prove by *practical*, scientific demonstration that there is such a thing as one *personal* God; while the esoteric philosophy, or rather *Theosophy* of Gautama Buddha and Shankaracharya *prove* and give means to every man to ascertain the undeniable presence of a living God in man himself — whether one believes in or calls his divine indweller Avalokiteśvara, Buddha, Brahma, Krishna, Jehovah, Bhagawan, Ahura-Mazda, Christ, or by whatever name — there is no such God outside of himself. The former — the one ideal outsider — *can never be demonstrated* — the latter, under whatever appellation, may always be found present if a man does not extinguish within himself the capacity to perceive this Divine presence, and hear the voice of that only manifested deity, the murmurings of the Eternal *Vāch*, called by the Northern and Chinese Buddhist Avalokiteśvara and Kwan-Shai-yin, and by the Christians — *Logos*.

H.P. BLAVATSKY



¹ [Francis Bacon in his *Novum Organum* first described the concept of a situation in which one theory but not others would hold true, using the name *instantia crucis*; the phrase *experimentum crucis*, denoting the deliberate creation of such a situation for the purpose of testing the rival theories, was later coined by Robert Hooke and then famously used by Isaac Newton. — *Wikipedia*.]

Godless Buddhism ennobled even the least philosophical of the dissenting sects of Gautama's religion, the Lamaism of the nomadic Kalmyks.

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WHATEVER MAY BE SAID AGAINST GODLESS BUDDHISM, its influence, wherever it penetrates, is most beneficent. One finds the Spirit of Lord Buddha . . . most pitiful, the Teacher of Nirvāna and the Law, ennobling even the least philosophical of the dissenting sects of his religion — the Lamaism of the nomadic Kalmyks.¹ The Caspian Steppes witnessed, only a few months ago, the solemn cremation and burial of a Mongolian saint, whose ashes were watered by as many Christian as Lamaic tears. [29] The high priest to the Russian Kalmyks of the Volga died December 26th, 1886, near Vetlyanka, once the seat of the most terrible epidemics.² The Gelungs had chosen the day of ceremony in accordance with their sacred books; the hour was fixed astrologically, and at noon on January 4th, 1887, the imposing ceremony took place. More than 80,000 people assembling from all the neighbouring Cossack *stanitzas*³ and Kalmyk *oolooses*,⁴ formed a procession surrounding the pillar of cremation. The corpse having been fixed in an iron armchair, used on such ceremonies, was introduced into the hollow pillar, the flames being fed with supplies of fresh butter. During the whole burning, the crowd never ceased weeping and lamenting, the Russians being most violent in their expressions of sorrow, and with reason. For long years the defunct Lama had been a kind father to all the poor in the country, whether Christian or Lamaist. Whole villages of proletarians had been fed, clothed, and their poll-taxes paid out of his own private income. His property in pasture lands, cattle, and tithes was very large, yet the Lama was ever in want of money. With his death, the poor wretches, who could hardly keep soul in their bodies, have no prospect but starvation. Thus the tears of the Christians were as abundant, if not quite as unselfish, as those of the poor Pagans. Only the year before, the good Lama received 4,000 roubles from a Kalmyk *oolooss* (camp) and gave the whole to rebuild a burned down Russian village, and thus saved hundreds from death by hunger. He was never known during his long life to refuse any man, woman, or child, in need, whether Pagan or Christian, depriving himself of every comfort to help his poorer fellow-creatures. Thus died the last of the Lamas of the priestly hierarchy sent to the Astrakhan Kalmyks from beyond the Snowy Range some sixty years ago. A shameful story is told [30] of how a travelling Christian pilgrim imposed on the good Lama. The Lama had entrusted him with 30,000 roubles to be placed in the neighbouring town: but the Christian pilgrim disappeared, and the money with him.

¹ [The Kalmyks are a Mongol subgroup in Russia, whose ancestors migrated from Dzungaria in 1607. They created the Kalmyk Khanate in 1630–1771 in Russia's North Caucasus territory. Today they form a majority in the Republic of Kalmykia located in the Kalmyk Steppe, on the western shore of the Caspian Sea. They are the only traditionally Buddhist people whose homeland is located within Europe proper.]

² [Also known as Vetlyaninskaya Stanitz, in the Enotayevsky Uezd of the Province of Astrakhan, on the right shore of the Volga. It was in the territory of the Astrakhan Cossacks, and was established in 1764–1765. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

³ [villages]

⁴ [nomadic camps]

Suggested reading for students.



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