

Chapter 5

Hinduism and Buddhism

IN ancient India, coming from no one knows where, there was a dark-white population, called the Dravidians. They settled in the valley of the Ganges and there possessed a civilization. They had at this time already progressed above the older heliolithic culture. They knew considerable about astrology, practiced magic (psychokinesis), and believed in life after death.

Historians assert that these people never rose to the height of culture possessed by ancient Sumeria and ancient Egypt. Certain it is that they did not possess any form of writing, hence the assertions of the Brahman priests as to the high antiquity of the sacred writings of India must be discounted. If they existed, they existed elsewhere than in India.

Writing was brought into India at the time of the Aryan invasion, which was not earlier than the time of the great king Hammurabi, 2,200 B.C., who conquered the Sumerian-Akkadian empire and founded the first Babylonian empire. About the time the Semitic Amorites, under Hammurabi, made this conquest—the second time the land of the Euphrates and the Tigris had been conquered by a great Semitic leader, the first time being by Sargon I, in 2,750 B.C.—history tells us that an Aryan-speaking people who then occupied North Persia and Afghanistan came down through the passes to the northwest and conquered India.

Previous to this time India, as already mentioned, had a civilization springing from heliolithic culture, as heliolithic monuments still standing in India attest. But this Aryan people brought the art of writing, the Sanskrit, for instance, being an Aryan language. Thus it is, in spite of frequent assertions to the contrary, that the first sacred writings developed in India are several thousand years later in point of time than the first sacred writings known either in Sumeria or in Egypt. (See, for instance, *The Outline of History*, by H. G. Wells, page 147).

This invasion of the dominant and aggressive Aryan-speaking people also had another, and far less beneficial, result. The invading people constituted themselves rulers of the aboriginal population. They became priests as well as rulers, and to maintain their ascendancy and to discourage intermarrying with the natives at least encouraged, and probably founded, the caste system. Certain of themselves they established as the highest caste. This caste, the Brahmans, constituted themselves the exclusive teachers of the people, and the history of India is the history of the success of this caste, through sword and through the dissemination of cunningly devised religious dogmas, in

keeping the rest of the population servile to them. The Aryan invaders of about 2,200 B.C. brought with them not only the art of writing, but also traditional ideas about religion and magic (psychokinesis) and sacrificial rites and propitiation, that when written became a literature of vast and indefinite extent, known as the Veda. To latter Brahmans and to other Hindu castes of like belief, this most ancient literature of India came to be regarded not as the work of man, but as revelations in fabulously ancient times, made through semi-divine holy ones, called Rishis.

The composition of the Veda extended over hundreds of years and probably dates back to about 2,200 B.C. The oldest collection of sacred utterances are (1) the Samhitas, including the Rig Veda, embracing hymns of praise and prayer for use at sacrifices to the various gods; (2) the Atharva Veda, embracing the incantations used in connection with magic rites; (3) the Yajur Veda, embracing sacrificial formulas and litanies; and (4) the Sama Veda, embracing chants and rituals.

The priesthood later wrote extensive commentaries on the older Samhitas, and these were included in the Veda as the Brahmanas. Then as appendices to the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads were written. These Upanishads, containing as they do the first extensive speculative philosophy, rose to very high esteem, and became the foundation upon which rests the varied and highly meritorious philosophies of India.

In some of the higher philosophies it is taught that deliverance may be had by mystical union with the Super-Intelligence of the universe. This mystical union is through extension of consciousness to high levels, a phase of what is now called extrasensory perception Yoga explains the practices which lead to such union.

But there is a great abyss between such philosophies and the religion of the vast population of India. Animism abounds, and the masses commonly are ignorant idolators, worshipping objects that once were symbols of some principle to be venerated, but whose inner significance to them now is lost. Yet any and all of these devotees of Hinduism, so long as they obey the rules of caste and ritual demanded by the Brahmans, are not otherwise subject to religious coercion.

It seems that in the beginning any person was qualified to practice magic, to control the lower spirits, and to make sacrifices to propitiate the gods. But as the rites became more complicated and more traditional a special class of Aryans developed whose exclusive duty it was to attend to these things. Among these a special cult devoted itself to the offering of the sacred drink, soma; and these elaborated a ritual in which three sacred fires were used. The Rig Veda is largely a hymn-book for use at these three fire ceremonies, and so elaborate were the rites that only royalty and wealthy men could afford them.

As time passed, so important became the ceremonies, that instead of the gods being besought for favors, in the Brahmanas we find the thought that the sacrifice is able to compel the gods, and finally that the ritual and sacrifice is the power that grants the desired boon. Also, by the time the Brahmanas were written the caste system was well developed and the priests were called "gods on earth." That is, they were to be considered the equal of gods.

Thus the priestly Brahmans came to occupy the highest caste. Next to these were the nobles and warriors. Then all the free Aryan people not included in the two upper classes were included in a third caste. The fourth caste embraced the dark-skinned aboriginal population who had been enslaved and subdued. These became the untouchables, 60 million of whom in

1947, by proclamation of the new free nation of Hindustan, legally were relieved of their caste restrictions.

As time passed, the four original castes were split up into other castes and sub-castes. All the while the Brahman caste imposed on the people ironbound domination to ceremony and ritual. This state of affairs, which up to the present has made of India a backward nation, however, cannot be laid at the door of the early Veda. It was cunningly devised by a priesthood seeking selfish advantages. Throughout the Veda are many high ideals and noble sentiments, and in the later works fine philosophic conceptions.

Because the Rig Veda was devoted to the ritual for the wealthy, the Atharva Veda furnished the material for the popular religion. There was a belief in various orders of spiritual beings, a belief that the planets influence human life, a belief in magic, and a belief that the soul of man exists in some other realm after death. But Hinduism, the dominant religion of India (the 60 million of Pakistan are Mohammedans), is not a religion of set beliefs; it is a religion of caste and ritual instituted by the priestly Brahmans.

Hinduism, which has the fourth largest following of any religion today—about 215 million people—as does Christianity, which has the largest following—about 600 million people embraces a large variety of cults and practices. It is the outgrowth, branching in various directions, of the old Vedic religion. While its adherents may give utmost precedence to this or that deity, they believe in the various gods of the Brahman priests. At least up to the present time they have believed in the rules of caste and the various rituals imposed upon them by the priests, and in all essential rites, such as those associated with marriage, birth, and death, they seek the aid of the Brahmans.

It should be understood that in India there are innumerable gods. Anything and everything may be deified. Philosophic progress, however, gradually brought about the recognition of one supreme Creator called the Power (Brahma). Brahma, the Creator, also became identified with the old Father-god, and as such is recognized as the most important god of the orthodox Brahmans. But there was still another god who had a powerful following. This was the kindly Sun-god Vishnu who, at least before the time of the Bhagavad Gita, was not a war god, but a god especially worshipped by philosophers and agriculturists. In addition to these two Aryan gods, the original Dravidian population had yet another god to whom they clung tenaciously. He is the terrifying deity whose worship was explained in chapter 2, a deity of wars and pestilence and destruction, the cruel god Siva who is particularly attractive to the wild tribes of India.

The religious textbooks of the Brahmans give instructions for offerings to be made to the spirits and gods of all the various sects and cults. Therefore, when the worshipers of Vishnu became numerous, and the worshipers of Siva also grew in number, to hold all under their dominion at least in matters of caste and ritual, the Brahmans joined these three gods—Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the preserver, and Siva, the destroyer. These from that time on were taught to be the three forms of the one all-powerful god, even as Christians also worship a Trinity.

But while these three are the powerful gods, the matter did not stop there, for whatever god was brought to the Brahmans, instead of denying it, they said that it was merely a form taken by one of the three powerful aspects of the one god. Thus Vishnu, who bears the symbol of the Sun, was revered by the philosophers as Lord Ishvara. Next he was worshipped as a clan god under the name Krishna or Vasueda. Later, again as a clan god he was revered as

Rama. Thus Vishnuism, which is popular in India today, has branched into the Rama sects, those who worship Rama, and the Krishnaites, those who worship Krishna, as well as into numerous lesser sects which each has a special deity to whom it gives chief homage. But this the Vishnu sects have in common, they are pantheistic, believing that the universe as a whole, embracing the seen and the unseen, is God.

While the various branches and sects embraced within Hinduism have been accepted by the Brahmans, it should not be thought that the Sankya and Vedanta religions, and many other philosophic sects, were also the offspring of expediency. On the contrary, they were the result of a deep longing to know the truth and concentrated intelligent application to finding it. These philosophical religions of India have much that is fine and true in them. They result from the strong pressure of intelligence being brought to bear upon the old beliefs.

But while under Hinduism almost anything could be believed and anything worshipped, the Brahmans saw to it that on one matter there was unanimous belief, that was the matter of the caste system.

This belief naturally arises from the dogma of karma and human reincarnation. If the station in life into which an individual is born is the just effect of his actions in past lives, whatever the environment and circumstances, they are merited.

If one is born into luxury and power, it is something to be proud of, a well merited reward for worthy effort in past lives. If one is born into poverty and servility, it is something about which no complaint should be made, for it is merited punishment for unworthy deeds in past lives. There is, therefore, no escape from poverty, misery, disease, and oppression to be had by endeavoring to alter these obnoxious conditions through initiative and enterprise. The way of escape from them lies in enduring them, and in such meritorious acts as are supposed to create good karma. The escape is not in this life, but in some future life when sufficient good karma has been accumulated. Just what actions create good karma is a matter for the priest to decide, and his decision is based on the personal advantages he will derive from the actions he advocates.

The people are divided into numerous castes, between which there is little in common. Each caste has its iron-bound rules of conduct. Castes do not intermarry, may not eat together, nor touch each other. Even the shadow of a low caste man, according to the doctrines of Hinduism, defiles a high caste man if it touches him, and if it falls on his food makes it unfit to eat.

Those of the higher caste feel little sympathy for those of low caste, as they consider the latter are paying with their misery the just penalty for the sins of former lives. Nor are they inclined in any manner to alleviate that suffering, as they believe that only through great misery will the low caste person be taught to create enough good karma that in the next life he may be born into a better caste. Should the lower caste feel inclined to resent the oppression of their high caste neighbors, they are refrained from aggressive action by the belief that it is their lot to endure, and if they do not submit, it merely means greater misery and sorrow in the next life. Initiative and enterprise are thus effectively discouraged.

I shall not here discuss the unsound features of the doctrine of human reincarnation which results in the doctrine of caste, as I have devoted Chapters 7 & 8, Course 2, *Astrological Signatures* to discussing these factors. But the best way to approach the subject is to become familiar with the manner in which nature actually operates, and the laws that may be observed which

give this information. These are given detailed discussion in Course 19, *Organic Alchemy*.

It is to be hoped that the political freedom recently given the 60 million inhabitants of India who belong to the lowest caste, the "untouchables," will in not too long a time abolish the whole caste system; for its doctrines hold the population in a straight jacket of iron from which there is no hope of escape to better things. The life of those belonging to each caste is bounded by unchanging rules. It is hedged in by innumerable restrictions. Not only is vast energy consumed in observing the particular rituals and observances of the caste, but a tremendous amount of it is spent in avoiding those things which the caste may not, in propriety, do. It hampers and restricts the life of the people as effectively as once did the hobble skirt of the Mohammedan women, or as once did the dwarfed feet of the Chinese women.

Where life is made to conform to fixed standards in so many ways there is no opportunity for progress. The people of a caste are forced to be, in all particulars, just what their ancestors have been. Furthermore, the system promotes the despoilation of the lower castes by those higher. The Brahmans in particular, who as priests are the highest caste, are given privileges by their caste which they grossly abuse. It enables them to live a life of ease and luxury, free from the toil of the lower castes, at the same time keeping the latter in dense ignorance, abject poverty, and unutterable misery. The caste system successfully thwarts progress, conduces to squalor and misery, promotes ignorance among the masses, and in general imposes obstacles in the path of all worth while effort. It is a doctrine opposed to human welfare.

The hopeless misery that has been the lot of the people of India from a very early date may very well be responsible for the Four Noble Truths propounded by Buddha. The idea had already been evolved by the Vishnuites that Vishnu at different times descended to earth in the form of an avatar, various notable persons in the past having been such manifestations.

Even in the Upanishads we find the Buddhistic idea that birth is sorrow" and the hope held forth that insight and communion with the Soul of All may lead the philosopher to become "Awakened," as later on was Buddha. And as far back as the Rig Veda we find the faint beginning of the doctrine of karma, for one is told to "join his good works" in heaven, and the implication that by good works merit may be so stored up that one can get "beyond the sun and so escape recurrent birth and death." Then in its later and more popular presentation it came to be recognized that between two successive physical lives there is an existence on a nonphysical plane where, as the case may be, there is an adequate taste of heaven or hell.

Siddhartha Guatama, supposed to be a prince of a Sakya clan living to the north of Benares, according to tradition was born about 562 B.C. Little is known about his birth and early life, for as falls the lot of great reformers his enthusiastic followers, under the impulse that earlier gave rise to the Hero Cult, have clothed this part of his life with miraculous happenings. Apparently he accepted the host of gods, godlings, spirits and demons generally believed in by his contemporaries. In this he may be compared with Jesus, who did not contradict or overthrow the teachings of Judaism, but accepted them, and used them as a basis for a still higher teaching. Both came not to destroy, but to fulfill the law. In many respects the lives of the three Saviours having the greatest following, Jesus, Mohammed and Buddha, run parallel.

This is particularly true in that their followers made claims for each that

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they had themselves taken pains to deny, and that in the course of time a great mass of custom, ritual, and doctrine from still older beliefs were adopted as if they also had been a part of the Saviour's teachings. Jesus puts to one side the imputation he is a god, stating plainly, so it seems to me, that he is a man. Buddha rejected the notion of some of his followers that he was the Lord of the Universe, stating plainly that he is "only a teacher." We now hear of an Esoteric Buddhism, yet Buddha himself repeatedly denied having any esoteric doctrine, stating that "his hand was not the closed fist of the teacher who keeps some things back."

The various sects of Christianity today have added a great amount of custom, ritual, and doctrine to the simple utterances of Jesus. So also, though in each case the great underlying doctrine of the teacher is preserved, Buddhism has split into sects and factions, and a vast amount of ritual, custom and doctrine has been added to it. So, if we are to get the original doctrine in its purity — either that propounded by Jesus or that propounded by Buddha — we must get as close as possible to the original source.

In neither case, so it seems, did anyone who heard the discourses write them down. One person told another, and this one handed it on to the next generation, and so on. It was probably even longer before any of Buddha's discourses were placed in writing than the time that elapsed after the crucifixion of Jesus before any of the Four Gospels were written.

The first proof of written scriptures in Buddhism is the edict of King Asoka in 242 B.C. — 240 years after Buddha's death — that the sacred books of the Law of Buddha should be collected. In the Pitkas, or baskets of the Laws, we have the earliest and most authoritative account of the actual teachings of Buddha, as distinct from the teachings of later sects. Of these earlier teachings the Dhammapada undoubtedly was compiled to give a summary of the essential principles of Buddha's doctrines to those who were incapable of committing to memory the complete contents of the three Pitkas. Excellent translations of some of these early works may be found in *The Sacred Books of the East*.

While there are parallels in the development of Buddhism and Christianity, in doctrine there is a constant contrast. Buddha dispenses entirely with psychokinetic proofs, while miracles take an important part at the beginning of Christianity. Buddha has no concern for superhuman authority, while Jesus looks constantly to the Father in Heaven. Christianity seeks some saving grace, or blood of the Lamb, or other form of vicarious atonement, but — which all observation of nature indicates to be correct — Buddhism insists that each must redeem himself.

Christianity adopted the old Hebrew idea of the creation of the world, and the manner sin came into the world; but Buddha attempted no explanation either of creation or of sin. Christianity teaches that pain and suffering may be alleviated by prayer — and observation shows they often are; and that the Saviour takes upon himself the burden of his follower's sins. Buddha does not teach that pain may thus be alleviated, and states that each must bear the burden of his own sin, declaring that no god even, can do for any man that work of self-emancipation and self-conquest that leads to salvation. In the Dhammapada, 163, he says:

By oneself the evil is done, by oneself one suffers. By oneself evil is left undone, by oneself one is purified. Purity and impurity belong to oneself; no man can purify another.

The goal of Buddhism is Nirvana. To many western scholars this amounts to annihilation. Yet there is a finer interpretation, which is the view of many Buddhists, that Nirvana is a tranquil and perfect mind, thus promising security from all attacks of the senses and lower passions in an intellectual and spiritual life. But in whatever state of life man finds himself, Buddhism admonishes him to trust no one but himself, to rely only on himself, and to look to no other. "Not even a god can change into defeat the victory of a man who has vanquished himself." Dhammapada, 105.

Tradition states that Prince Guatama, driven by a sense of the vanity and misery of human life left the palace of his father to seek enlightenment. The Brahmans he interviewed advised him, as was their doctrine, to seek it through self-macerations in the heart of a savage forest. After weary years of ascetic practices he found that he could not gain enlightenment in this manner. After adopting a more moderate way of life—the middle way—however, enlightenment dawned on him and he became the Buddha. He then immediately set forth teaching his gospel. He lived to be eighty years of age, and during his forty-five years of preaching made many converts.

The foundation of his teachings is contained in the Four Noble Truths concerning suffering, and the Noble Eightfold Path that leads to freedom from suffering. Other discourses and teachings of Buddha are merely an elaboration and a commentary on these.

To understand Buddha's viewpoint, we must recognize that along with the gods and demons of the Brahmans he had also been indoctrinated with the conception that the world of the senses is but an illusion, called *maya*. He held, then, that men are subject to pain and evil because they are dominated by the senses, by passions, and by selfish desires. And he taught that it is possible for man to transmute his interests from selfishness and carnal motives to the plane of pure intellect and spirit, and thus freed from the bonds of the senses to enter into the kingdom of Nirvana.

The view of many Buddhists, that life on earth is not worth while, that it is a painful experience to be avoided if possible, is the view quite generally held in India and not original with Buddha. He did, however, concretely formulate a related thought in his Four Noble Truths somewhat thus:

1. Birth and death are grief.
2. This grief of existence is caused by desire.
3. It ends when desire ends.
4. Desire may be extinguished by following the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Noble Eightfold Path by which Nirvana is gained is as follows:

1. Right Views (free from superstition or delusion).
2. Right Aims (worthy of intelligent man).
3. Right Speech (kindly, open, truthful).
4. Right Conduct (peaceful, honest, pure).
5. Right Livelihood (bringing hurt and danger to no living thing).
6. Right Effort (self-control).
7. Right Mindfulness (the active watchful mind)
8. Right Contemplation (on the deep mysteries of life).

Thus did Buddha teach that all the miseries and discontent of life are due to selfishness, that suffering is due to individual craving and greedy desire. These cravings are of three kinds; the craving to gratify the senses, the desire for personal immortality, and the desire for prosperity.

To attain Nirvana all these cravings must be overcome, there must be detachment from them, and the extinction of all personal aims. One must completely forget Self. He apparently accepted along with the opinion of his times certain ideas regarding karma, but he repeatedly condemned the prevalent belief in reincarnation. In fact, in one of the early well-known dialogues there is a destructive analysis of the belief in or desire for an enduring individual soul. Having tried it fruitlessly himself, his doctrines are firmly opposed to any form of asceticism, holding that it is merely an attempt to win personal power by personal pain. To sum the matter up in a single clause, Buddha taught Salvation from Oneself.

Buddha preached a very simple doctrine, and lived a very simple life; but his followers—as did the followers of both Jesus and Mohammed—immediately after his death began to weave a network of legend about his life. And because he took no pains to accept or deny most of the forms of worship by which he was surrounded, these began to creep into Buddhism as an integral part of it even as the pomp and ritual of pagan Rome infiltrated Christianity and became an integral part of the Christian religion. Nor is it confined to the church before the Martin Luther reformation; for nowhere in the Bible can be found sanction for Santa Claus, a Christmas tree, or eggs and rabbits at Easter.

Buddha did, however, deny the pernicious human reincarnation supported doctrine of caste. This took courage. "As the four streams that flow into the Ganges lose their names as soon as they mingle their waters in the holy river, so all who believe in Buddha cease to be Brahmans, Kahatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras."

This attitude, of course, brought Buddhism eventually into conflict with the Brahmans, even as politically removing the caste restrictions from the 60 million "untouchables" in 1947 will bring opposition from the Brahmans, who then and now clung tenaciously to the caste system and to the prerogative of acting as the sole teachers of religious ritual and practice, and as the sole officials practicing sacrificial rites. Early Buddhists were not vegetarians, but this later became part of the Buddhist doctrine. They did, however, ignore caste, and needed no sacrificial offerings.

Under the patronage and wise leadership of King Asoka, about the middle of the third century B.C., Buddhism spread far beyond India. Eventually it reached China, Japan, Tibet, Burma, Manchuria and Turkestan; being the religion today of a large following in these countries.

But in India, due to its denial of the caste system, it became the target of relentless persecution by the Brahmans. Eventually they were successful in driving it from India, and even while it remained there the early converts from Hinduism were successful in introducing into it much of the Brahmanic ideas and rituals.

Buddha taught a simple doctrine and simplicity of living. But the Buddhist church in India and elsewhere at a very early date began to adopt customs, rituals, and metaphysics from a wide variety of sources. The simple huts in which Buddha and his disciples lived gave place to pretentious monasteries, and later still there were temples. In fact, the practices and worldly show that Buddha held most in contempt came to dominate the Buddhist church, and following the old Brahmanic doctrine of avatars, Gautama was proclaimed as one of the numerous incarnations of the superhuman Buddha.

To indicate how far Buddhism of today in most countries is from the simple and spiritual doctrines taught by Buddha I can do no better than quote two paragraphs from *The Outline of History*, by H. G. Wells:

Tibet today is a Buddhist country, yet Gautama. could he return to earth, might go from end to end of Tibet seeking his own teaching in vain. He would find that most ancient type of human ruler, a god king, enthroned, the Dalai Lama, the 'Living Buddha.' At Lhasa he would find a huge temple filled with priests, abbots, lamas—he whose only buildings were huts and who made no priests—and above a high altar he would behold a huge golden idol, which he would learn was called 'Gautama Buddha.' He would hear services intoned before this divinity, and certain precepts, which would be dimly familiar to him, murmured as responses. Bells, incense, prostrations, would play their part in these amazing proceedings. At one point in the service a bell would be rung and a mirror lifted up, while the whole congregation, in an access of reverence, bowed low.

About this Buddhist countryside he would discover a number of curious little mechanisms, little wind-wheels and water wheels spinning, on which brief prayers were inscribed. Every time these things spin, he would learn, it counts as a prayer. 'To whom?' he would ask. Moreover there would be a number of flagstaves in the land carrying beautiful flags, silk flags which bore the perplexing inscription, 'Om Mani padme hum,' 'the jewel in the lotus.' Whenever the flag flaps he would learn, it was a prayer also, very beneficial to the gentleman who paid for the flag and to the land generally. Gangs of workmen, employed by pious persons, would be going about the country cutting this precious formula on cliff and stone. And this, he would realize at last, was what the world had made of his religion! Beneath this gaudy glitter was buried the Aryan Way to serenity of soul.

In Buddhism today—which with about 140 million adherents has the fifth largest following of any religion, although the total who believe in Animism is about the same number—there are about as many sects as there are in Christianity. One of the early divisions was the breaking away from the old faith about 200 B.C. of the School of the Great Vehicle. This school adopted the idea that Buddha was a superhuman, and promulgated the doctrine of avatars, and taught that Buddha's mother was a virgin—as a few hundred years later it was taught that the mother of Jesus was a virgin—that his birth was accompanied by flowers falling from heaven, and that at his death the earth quaked—as a few hundred years later it was believed that there were earthquakes when Jesus was crucified.

The Church of the Little Vehicle and the Church of the Great Vehicle are somewhat analogous to the Greek Church and the Roman Church of Catholic Christianity. The primitive church had three articles of faith that its members confessed: "I believe in Buddha as a sure guide; in the law of Buddha (Dharma); and in the Church (Sangha)."

About 200 B.C. Buddhism found its way to China, and eventually through Korea to Japan. We find in China alternating periods in which Buddhism flourished, and then, due to new political regimes, was suppressed by persecutions. It influenced Taoism, as for instance when in the fourth century it adopted the doctrine of future punishment. But even to a greater extent Taoism and Confucianism influenced Buddhism as found in China.

As early as 583 A.D. an image of Buddha was sent to Japan from Korea,

and in 593 A.D. Prince Shotoku Taishi learned from a Korean priest the Buddhist moral code; not to lie, not to steal, not to get drunk, not to commit adultery, and not to kill. This prince, who was virtually the ruler of the country, used all his power in behalf of Buddhism. He built 46 Buddhist temples, erected many Buddhist images, and housed 1,385 Buddhist monks and nuns.

The Buddhist priests taught the barbaric Japanese that the Sun-deity that they worshipped was none other than the Buddha who was worshipped under the name of the Sun of Righteousness. The Japanese before this had largely been converted by the Koreans to ancestor worship, but the Buddhists discouraged this. They encouraged cremation instead of burial, advised that sacrifices be confined to vegetables rather than embrace slaughtered animals, identified the various Buddhistic gods with those of Shintoism, taught their moral code, introduced their figures, saints and incarnations. They effectively took over and transmuted the Shintoism and the Taoism and the Confucianism that had by this time permeated it, so that it all came to conform with the Buddhist doctrine. Thus from 673 to 686 Emperor Temmu made the Buddhist ceremony obligatory in every home and strictly prohibited the eating of meat.

Space does not permit going into the details of the belief of each Buddhist sect. Some of these sects have much in common with Christianity. Among most of them there has been much tolerance of the gods of their neighbors. And in many instances the gods and customs of their neighbors have been incorporated into Buddhism.

The Weakness of Buddhism

From the viewpoint of The Religion of the Stars the basic premise of Buddhism and some other Oriental doctrines — that life is not worth while and should be escaped as early as possible, or that it is chiefly grief to be avoided — is erroneous. The urge behind life is to attain significance, more and more significance, through developing more and more ability, and thus instead of seeking either oblivion or some static condition in which effort is no longer necessary, the individual should seek to co-operate with other constructive intelligences in building a worthwhile civilization, and a worthwhile universe in which to live and function as a Self-Conscious Immortal soul.

As explained in Course 19, *Organic Alchemy*, to develop the qualities necessary to become a co-operative and valuable workman in the realization of God's Evolutionary Plan, the soul must undergo experiences. Only through learning to overcome difficulties can it acquire ability. Only through experience can consciousness be widened. And self-conscious immortality is possible only as the fruition of some such struggle with environment as that which man undergoes in physical life. Human life, therefore, instead of being a curse, as Orientals frequently imagine, is the doorway to better things, is, in fact, the one known doorway through which man attains the highest imaginable good.

Furthermore, now that the very initiative and enterprise that so systematically have been suppressed in India have improved living conditions in the West, the majority of Western people, I believe, enjoy living. That is, they glory in the struggle to accomplish something; and the pleasure of living more than compensates for its hardships. And the more people view life as a glorious opportunity, as something to be thankful for, and as something to make the best of, the happier they become, and the more they accomplish.

If we hate and despise the work we do, in this case life itself not only does the work cause us grief, but by our discordant attitude we build inharmonies into our thought-cells that cause them to use their psychokinetic power to bring misfortune into our lives. Furthermore, as explained in Chapter 4, Course

5, *Esoteric Psychology*, all action and accomplishment is due to the release of energy which while under tension is called desire. If we kill out desire, we kill out all power of accomplishment. Instead of killing out desire, we should recondition it so that it will give us the power to get what we want. And we should want, as all life does, greater satisfaction for the drive for significance, the drive for nutrition and the drive for reproduction. Instead of relinquishing life and effort, we should strive to realize these three drives not only on earth, but progressively after life on earth is done by assisting in the work of evolution, assisting in it by CONTRIBUTING OUR UTMOST TO UNIVERSAL WELFARE.

As far back as there are records certain individuals have sought power and special privileges through being the interpreters of the will of Deity. In the West the priestly group cunningly created an imaginary heaven and an imaginary hell, and formulated other beliefs and usages to their own advantage. They made people believe that anyone who used facts and reason to reach conclusions about religious matters would be tortured, not for just a brief period, but everlastingly in hell. But those who confessed to the beliefs held by the priesthood would forever be happy in the imaginary heaven the priests had created.

Thus in the West the people were kept behind an iron curtain of ignorance relative to all inner-plane matters (see Chapter 1, Course 12-1, *Natural Alchemy, Evolution of Life*), and held by orthodoxy in complete mental slavery.

More is said about this in chapter 6, but it is brought to attention here to show both the contrast and the similarity between the methods used by the priests of the East and the priests of the West to attain the same end; the end of retaining authority and material advantages not possessed by most. In the West much freedom of action is permitted; but there is slavery of thought. In the East, on the other hand, there is the utmost freedom of thought, but iron-clad slavery of action.

The soul in its Cycle of Necessity, through the experiences it acquires in one form, is able after the death of this body psychokinetically to attach itself to the fertilized seed of another and more complex form and live in it during its life. But the steps, as explained in Course 19, *Organic Alchemy*, are always progressive, always toward forms higher in the scale of evolution. And when the form of man is reached, the universe in miniature, the soul's evolution requires that it shall not return to occupy any other life-form on earth, but shall continue its development and progress in the high-velocity inner-plane regions.

This evolution of the soul through progressive forms was recognized by the initiates of each of the ancient centers of civilization. And the conception was brought to India by the early Aryan invaders, and may have been in India before they came. But to keep their position secure, they gave it an inverse twist. To keep the people servile they remodeled it into the doctrine of karma and human reincarnation.

The Brahman caste not only retained the position of highest social importance and influence, but it held to itself the prerogative of teaching others precisely how they must behave, and the prerogative of performing the rituals. But it did not attempt to stifle thought. Nowhere has there been greater liberty in thinking than in India. It has been the general custom there to permit people to think as they please, so long as they do not depart in the slightest degree from the actions which eons ago were established by the Brahmans, the priestly caste.

**The Means Orthodoxy
Has Employed to
Enslave the People
of the East**

Mentally, the individual is free. But in his actions he is bound as in a vice, and hedged around by a multitude of useless observances. Should he neglect any one of these he loses caste, which is not merely a forfeiture of previous associations, but may mean starvation.

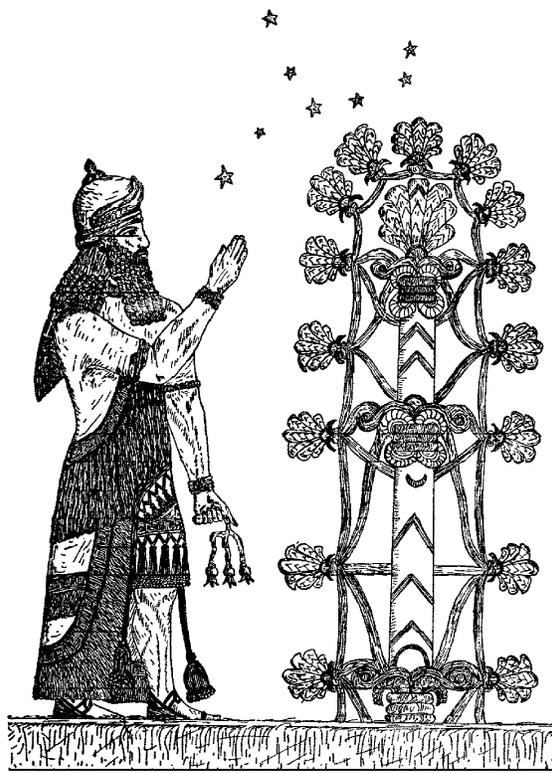
To enforce the rules they had made, and to maintain themselves in opulence and power, the old-time Aryan priests taught the transmigration of the soul. They taught the people that being born into the highly favored Brahman caste was the reward of good karma. These priests had been born into the favored position as a just reward for living exceptionally holy lives in lower castes. Those undergoing the hardships and suffering common to low castes, if they endured their lot with fortitude, and lived holy lives, might look forward, not to heaven, as in western lands, but in time to being born Brahmans. But if they transgressed the moral precepts laid down by the priests, they might look forward to being born in the next life as some loathsome animal.

However, the priests, the Brahman caste, were not strict and specific that the next birth of the evil doer would be in some creature lower than man. All they insisted on was that the person who made good karma would have a better time in the next life, and the one who made bad karma would suffer in the next life. And to make good karma the individual could think as he pleased, but he must behave according to the orthodox precepts laid down by the Brahmans.

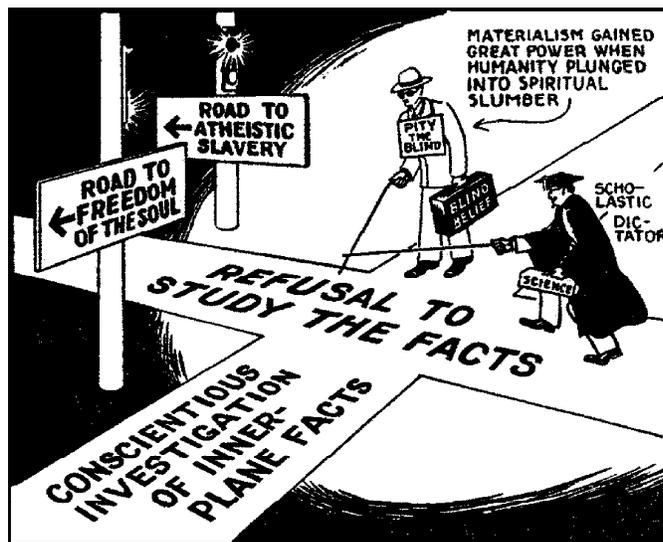
As the Brahmans permitted freedom of belief, one after another they tended to absorb all the multitude of sects that developed in India. The moral code of Hinduism is that the evil received in this life is due to evil done others in a past life. Therefore, it behooves one to act kindly and justly—provided rules of action laid down by the Brahmans are not overstepped in such benevolent conduct—in this life, making good karma, that one may be born to a happier lot in the next physical incarnation.

While some of the higher philosophies of India teach that deliverance may be attained through a mystical union with Brahma (deity), that is, through attaining divine consciousness, and some teach that the wheel of rebirth may be escaped and nirvana attained by one who continues to live one holy life after another, and others teach various exalted ideas, the Brahmans are content with any philosophy that embraces karma and human reincarnation; for mostly transmigration into the bodies of animals has now been replaced by the doctrine of repeated births in human form. And the Brahmans, retaining as much as possible the privilege of being the teacher caste, see to it that each and every philosophy embraces this orthodox tenet.

As the orthodoxies of the West hold their followers in slavery by fear of hell and the promise of heaven, so the orthodoxies of the East hold their followers in slavery by fear of being born in future lives to greater suffering, and by the promise of being born to opulence and happiness in lives yet to come. The only real difference in the cunning and deceptive psychology used, is that in the West the punishment threatened or the reward promised is to be on the inner plane, while in the East the punishment threatened or the reward promised is to be realized on earth.







Drawing by Mildred Schuler

