



**STRIPPING
THE
GURUS**

**Sex, Violence,
Abuse and Enlightenment**

GEOFFREY D. FALK

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Ramakrishna was a homoerotic pedophile.

His chief disciple, Vivekananda, visited brothels in India.

Krishnamurti carried on an affair for over twenty years with the wife of a close friend. Chögyam Trungpa drank himself into an early grave. One of Adi Da's nine "wives" is a former Playboy centerfold. Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh sniffed laughing gas to get high. Andrew Cohen, guru and publisher of *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine, by his own reported admission sometimes feels "like a god."

These are typical of the "wizeded sages" to whom otherwise-sensible people give their devotion and unquestioning obedience, surrendering their independence, willpower, and life's savings in the hope of realizing for themselves the same "enlightenment" as they ascribe to the "perfect, God-realized" master.

Why?

Is it for being emotionally vulnerable and "brainwashed," as the "anti-cultists" assert? Or for being "willingly psychologically seduced," as the apologists unsympathetically counter, confident that they themselves are "too smart" to ever fall into the same trap? Or have devotees simply walked, with naïvely open hearts and thirsty souls, into inherent psychological dynamics of power and obedience which have showed themselves in classic psychological studies from Milgram to Zimbardo, and to which each one of us is susceptible every day of our lives?

Like the proud "Rude Boy" Cohen allegedly said, with a laugh, in response to the nervous breakdown of one of his devoted followers: "It could happen to any one of you."

Don't let it happen to you. Don't get suckered in. Be prepared. Be informed. Find out what reportedly goes on behind the scenes in even the best of our world's spiritual communities.

You can start by reading this book.

* The inclusion of any particular individual in *Stripping the Gurus* is not meant to suggest or imply that he or she represents him- or herself as a guru, nor is it meant to suggest or imply that he or she has indulged in sex, violence, the abuse of others, or any other illegal or immoral activities.

Praise for *Stripping the Gurus*

Armed with wit, insight, and truly astonishing research, Geoffrey Falk utterly demolishes the notion of the enlightened guru who can lead devotees to nirvana. This entertaining and yet deadly serious book should be read by everyone pursuing or thinking of pursuing the path of guru devotion.

—John Horgan,
author of *Rational Mysticism*

Stripping the Gurus is superb—one of the best books of its kind I have ever read. The research is meticulous, the writing engaging, and the overall thesis: devastatingly true. A stellar book.

—Dr. David C. Lane,
California State University

This gripping and disturbing book should be read by anyone who finds themself revering a spiritual teacher.

—Susan Blackmore,
author of *The Meme Machine*

Geoffrey Falk's delightful but disturbing unmasking of religious prophets and preachers who command a vast following is a welcome contribution to the literature on the gurus and god-men of all religions.

—Dr. Narasingha P. Sil,
Western Oregon University

No one involved in contemporary spirituality can afford to ignore this book. It exposes the darker side of modern spiritual movements, those embarrassing—sometime vicious or criminal—reports which the leaders of these movements prefer to hide. With wit and humility, and without abandoning the verities of religion, Falk has provided a corrective critique of groups that peddle enlightenment and transcendence. A must!

—Len Oakes,
author of *Prophetic Charisma*

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Million Monkeys Press

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Published by Million Monkeys Press
P.O. Box 68586
360A Bloor St. W.
Toronto, ON M5S 3C9
Web: www.strippingthegurus.com

ISBN 978-0-9736203-3-7 (pdf)
ISBN 978-0-9736203-1-3 (cloth)
ISBN 978-0-9736203-2-0 (paperback)

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INTRODUCTION

ONE OF MY DEAR, late mother's most memorable expressions, in attempting to get her children to behave, was simply: "Be sure your sins will find you out."

It may take a minute, an hour, a day, a year, ten years or more, but eventually the details of one's behaviors are likely to surface. Whether one's public face is that of a saint or a sinner, ultimately "the truth will out."

This book, then, concerns the alleged sins which have been concealed behind the polished façades of too many of our world's "saintly and sagely" spiritual leaders and their associated communities, with a marked focus on North America over the past century.

Why, though, would anyone write such a book as this? Why not just "focus on the good," and work on one's own self-transformation instead?

First of all, one hopes to save others from the sorrow inherent in throwing their lives away in following these figures. Even the most elementary bodhisattva vow, for the liberation of others from suffering, would leave one with no moral choice but to do one's part in that. Likewise, even the most basic understanding as to the nature of "idiot compassion" would preclude one from ignoring these reported problems just to be "nice" or avoid offending others.

As a former follower of Carlos Castaneda eloquently put it, in relating the depressing and disillusioning story of her experiences with him, amid her own "haunting dreams of suicide":

[I]f some reader, somewhere, takes a moment's pause and halts before handing over his or her free will to another, it will all have counted for something (Wallace, 2003).

Or, as Margery Wakefield (1991) expressed her own opinion:

As trite as it may sound, if I can prevent even one other person, especially a young person, from having to live through the nightmare of Scientology—then I will feel satisfied.

Second, I personally spent the worst nine months of my life at one of Paramahansa Yogananda's approved southern California ashrams (i.e., hermitages/monasteries), and have still not recovered fully from that awful experience. I thus consider this as part of my own healing process. That is, it is part of my dealing with the after-effects of the "wisdom" meted out in that environment by its loyal, "God-inspired" participants.

Third, with my own background in Eastern philosophy, we may hope to do all this without misrepresenting the metaphysical ideas involved. With or without that, though, it is not the validity of the theoretical ideas of each path which are, in general, of concern here. Rather, of far greater interest are the ways in which the leaders espousing those ideas have applied them in practice, frequently to the claimed detriment of their followers.

Fourth, the mapping of reported ashram behaviors to psychologist Philip Zimbardo's classic prison study, as presented in the "Gurus and Prisoners" chapter, yields significant insights into the origins and pervasiveness of the alleged problems cataloged herein.

Fifth, to paraphrase Sherlock Holmes, if we eliminate everything which is impossible, then what is left, however improbable it may appear, must be the case. Becoming aware of the reported issues with our world's "sages" and their admirers, then, eliminates many pleasant but "impossible" hopes one may have with regard to the nature of spirituality and religion.

This book will not likely change the mind of any loyal disciple of any of the spiritual figures and paths specifically addressed herein. Indeed, no amount of evidence of alleged abuse or hypocrisy on the part of those leaders could do so, for followers who are convinced that they have found "God in the flesh," in their spiritual hero.

This text may, however, touch some of those devotees who are already halfway to realizing what is going on around them. And more importantly, in quantitative good, it may give a “heads up” to persons who would otherwise be suckered in by the claims of any particular “God-realized being”—as I myself was fooled, once upon a time. And thus, it may prevent them from becoming involved with the relevant organization(s) in the first place.

Ultimately, the “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil” approach to life simply allows the relevant problems to continue. No one should ever turn a blind eye to secular crimes of forgery, incest, rape or the like. Much less should those same crimes be so readily excused or forgiven when they are alleged to occur in spiritual contexts. That is so particularly when they are claimed to be perpetrated by leaders and followers insisting that they have “God on their side,” and that any resistance to their reported blunders or rumored power-tripping abuses equates to being influenced by *Maya*/Satan.

To say nothing in the face of evil, after all, is to implicitly condone it. Or equally, as the saying goes, “For evil to triumph in this world, it is only necessary for good people to do nothing.”

In the words of Albert Einstein:

The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it.

The alert reader will further note that, aside from my own relatively non-scandalous (but still highly traumatic) personal experiences at Hidden Valley, all of the allegations made herein—none of which, to my knowledge, except where explicitly noted, have been proved in any court of law—have already been put into print elsewhere in books and magazine articles. In all of those cases, I am relying in good faith on the validity of the extant, published research of the relevant journalists and ex-disciples. I have made every effort to present that existing reported data without putting any additional “spin” on it, via juxtapositions or otherwise. After all, the in-print (alleged) realities, in every case, are jaw-dropping enough that no innuendo or taking-out-of-context would have ever been required in order to make our world's “god-men” look foolish.

As the Dalai Lama (1999) expressed his own opinion, regarding the value of such investigative journalism:

I respect and appreciate the media's interference.... It is appropriate ... to have journalists ... snooping around and exposing wrongdoing where they find it. We need to know when this or that renowned individual hides a very different aspect behind a pleasant exterior.

As to the quantity of reported "sins" covered uncomplimentarily herein, please appreciate that I myself am, in general, in no way anti-drug, anti-alcohol, anti-dildo, anti-secret-passageway-to-the-women's-dormitory, anti-whorehouse or anti-orgy, etc. It is simply obvious, by now, that any of those, when put into the hands of "god-men" who have carved islands of absolute power for themselves in the world, only make an already dangerous situation much worse.

Of course, all such protests to the contrary, it is the very nature of the gathering and publicizing of information such as this that one will be regarded as being either puritanical or shadow-projecting for doing so. Why else, after all, would anyone object to guru-disciple sex, etc., in situations where the "non-divine" party too often is a psychological child in the relationship, unable to say "No"?

The guideline that "all's fair among consenting adults so long as no one gets hurt" is reasonable enough. So then simply ask yourself as you read this book: In how many, if any, of the environments covered here has no one "gotten hurt"?

Finally, with regard to the use of humor herein, the late Christopher Reeve put it appropriately: "When things are really bad, you have to laugh."

January, 2009
Toronto, Ontario

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CHAPTER I

SPEAK NO EVIL

The wicked are wicked no doubt, and they go astray, and they fall, and they come by their desserts. But who can tell the mischief that the very virtuous do?

—William Makepeace Thackeray

ONE WOULD LIKE TO BELIEVE that our world's recognized saints and sages have the best interests of everyone at heart in their thoughts and actions.

One would also like to believe that the same “divinely loving” and enlightened figures would never distort truth to suit their own purposes, and would never use their power to take advantage (sexually or otherwise) of their followers. They would, that is, be free of the deep psychological quirks, prejudices, hypocrisy and violence which affect mere mortals.

One would further hope that the best of our world's sages would be able to distinguish between valid mystical perceptions and mere hallucinations, and that the miracles and healings which they have claimed to have effected have all actually occurred.

Sadly, none of those hopes stand up to even the most basic rational scrutiny.

Thus, it has come to be that you are holding in your hands an extremely evil book.

It is so, simply because it attempts to expose, to a wider audience, the worst of the alleged abuses which various “god-men” have reportedly visited upon their followers, and on the world at large, over the past century or more.

In tracing that line of degeneracy more or less chronologically, from the introduction of Eastern philosophy into Western thought and action up to the present day, we will meet the following “saints and sages”:

- Ramakrishna, whose worship of the Divine Mother did not exclude comparable ritual veneration for his own penis, or an equal interest in fondling the genitals of his male followers
- The brothel-visiting Vivekananda, Ramakrishna’s chief disciple, who first brought yoga to America via the 1893 World’s Fair, and thus paved the way into the West for all following Eastern teachers
- Jiddu Krishnamurti, the Theosophical Society’s eagerly anticipated “World Teacher,” who later broke from that organization, fully repudiating it, and then embarked on a quarter-century affair with a woman whom he believed to be the reincarnation of his late mother
- Japanese Zen masters and scholars, whose support of the use of Zen principles in the training of the Japanese military during times of war, and reported physical abuse of disciples in times of peace, will give us serious pause
- Satchidananda, the “Woodstock Swami,” who repudiated drugs and rock ‘n’ roll, but reportedly retained a fondness for sex with his female disciples
- The Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, famed for his involvement with the Beatles, his alleged failed attempt at seducing Mia Farrow, and his efforts at teaching the “real magic” of levitation to the late magician Doug Henning, among others
- Swami Rama, renowned for his purported demonstration of parapsychological abilities under Elmer and Alyce Green in the 1970s, as another “holy celibate” who apparently couldn’t keep his robes on

- Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, who reportedly once admitted, while sniffing laughing gas to get high, that he was “so relieved to not have to pretend to be enlightened any more”
- Satya Sai Baba, whose claimed “miracles” have included raising people from the dead, producing streams of “sacred ash” from his hands—a feat easily replicated by secular magicians—and allegedly molesting hundreds of young boys
- Sri Chinmoy, the “stunt man of the spiritual world,” whose disciples to this day periodically canvass campuses across North America with flyers touting the purported benefits of meditation under his guidance
- Buddhist monks in Thailand, who have been known to proudly exhibit expensive collections of antique cars, and to don disguises, sneak out to local karaoke bars, and be caught with pornography, alcohol, sexual paraphernalia, and *more than one woman* at a time
- Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard, whose FBI files contained the observation, “appears mental”
- Werner Erhard, originator of est group training, who brought us the phrase, “Thank you for sharing”
- Yogi Bhajan, the claimed “only living master of white tantric yoga in the world”
- Chögyam Trungpa, who brought Tibetan Buddhism to America, and proceeded to drink himself into an early grave
- Swami Muktananda, whose ashram living quarters in India reportedly contained a well-used secret passageway to the adjacent young girls’ dormitory
- Muktananda’s name-changing disciple Adi Da (Da Free John, Da Love-Ananda, etc.), whose “crazy wisdom” exploits propelled him to exile in Fiji in the mid-’80s, following allegations of sexual abuse
- Andrew Cohen, whose own Jewish mother has regarded his closed authoritarian spiritual community as embodying a “fascist mind-set,” with its members behaving like “Gestapo agents.” (Such closed communities are of homogeneous beliefs, have little exchange of ideas with the outside world,

and possess no option of questioning the leader while still remaining a member in good standing. Further, to leave the community is typically claimed to be to throw away one's only "chance in this lifetime for enlightenment" [van der Braak, 2003].) She has further rejected Cohen's claims of enlightenment, comparing him instead to the "cult" leaders Jim Jones and David Koresh, and even to Adolf Hitler

- Ken Wilber, the "Einstein of consciousness studies," who has at times spoken with unbridled enthusiasm for the effects of discipline under both Adi Da and Cohen
- Yogi Amrit Desai, formerly of the Kripalu yoga center, whose followers there, when news of the claimed sexual activities between the married Desai and his devotees surfaced, displayed unique discrimination in reportedly forcing him to leave the center he himself had founded
- Assorted sexually active Roman Catholic priests—pedophile, ephebophile and otherwise
- The Findhorn community in Scotland, which actually functions without a guru-figure, arguably doing more good than harm for exactly that reason
- Paramahansa Yogananda, author of the spiritual classic *Autobiography of a Yogi*, whose troubled ashrams the present author can speak of from first-hand experience

With only a few exceptions, the above figures have taught authentic Eastern philosophy of one variety or another. They have further been widely recognized and duly advertised as possessing high degrees of spiritual realization. Indeed, one can easily find loyal followers singing the praises of each of these individuals and paths, in books and sanctioned websites. (Both Steven Hassan's www.freedomofmind.com site and the Rick A. Ross Institute at www.rickross.com have many such links to "official" websites.) To find the reported "dirt" on each of them, however, requires a fair bit more effort. Nevertheless, it is those alleged worst aspects, not the often-advertised best, which leave formerly devoted disciples picking up the pieces of their shattered lives, and wondering aloud how they could ever have been so blind as to buy into the "perfect master's" propaganda in the first place.

This is, therefore, a very "dirty" book. For, it presents not only the representative (and, after a while, completely unbelievable)

claims to perfection or God-realization of each of the forty or so major and minor “authentic” spiritual figures considered herein, but also the alleged shortcomings of each, as those have affected their followers. Obviously, then, to cover all of that in a single text requires that only the most grandiose of the claims, and the worst of the foibles and alleged abuses, of each “sage” be mentioned herein.

Unless one enjoys seeing other people suffer—or effecting or reliving one’s own process of disillusionment—however, this is not going to be pretty. For, in probing this lineage, we will find legions of alleged emotional, physical and sexual abuses perpetrated “in the name of God,” by persons neither impotent nor omnipotent, yet claiming to be “one with God.”

By the end of all this unpleasantness, then, at least one thing will undoubtedly be clear. That is, that with “gods” like these, we do not need devils. For, every evil which one might otherwise ascribe to Satan or *Maya* has allegedly been perpetrated by one or another “God-realized avatar” or ostensibly “perfected being.”

Of course, the forthcoming shocking disclosures will predictably result in a good amount of “wailing and gnashing of teeth” among obedient followers. Indeed, that is to be expected particularly among loyal adherents to each path for whom the “perfection” and infallibility of their own leader is not open to questioning, even if they may allow that none of the *other* “sagely” individuals considered herein are what they claim to be. (Part of the value of grouping all of these pretenses and alleged abuses together in a single book is exactly that one can see that the “unique” claims of one’s own path are also being made, equally untenably, by numerous *other* paths.) Nevertheless, if we are really interested in truth, we should still *welcome* having the hypocrisies and (alleged) abusive evils of persons in positions of spiritual authority be laid bare to the world. Exposing them to the public eye, after all, is the only way to get them to stop.

Thus, “onward and evil-ward.”

CHAPTER II

A BIT OF A BOOBY

(SRI RAMAKRISHNA)

[Ramakrishna] is a figure of recent history and his life and teachings have not yet been obscured by loving legends and doubtful myths (in [Ramakrishna, 2003](#)).

Ramakrishna ... gained recognition from his devotees and admirers that he was [an incarnation of] Christ.... When [Mahendra Nath Gupta, a prominent disciple] told his Master that he was the same person as Jesus and Chaitanya, Ramakrishna affirmed enthusiastically: “Same! Same! Certainly the same person” (Sil, 1998).

I am an avatar. I am God in human form (Ramakrishna, in [Nityatmananda, 1967]).

THE STORY OF YOGA and yogis in the West—and of their corresponding alleged abuses of power, most often reportedly for sexual purposes—really begins with Swami Vivekananda’s lectures at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893.

Vivekananda’s story, however, begins with his own guru, Sri Ramakrishna, the latter having been born in India in 1836. (“Sri”

is an East Indian title of respect, akin to the English “Sir.”) Thus, it is to the latter that we shall first turn our attention.

As a child, the boy Ramakrishna—who later claimed to be the incarnation of both Krishna and Rama—“loved to dress up and act like a girl” (Sil, 1997). He was, indeed, aided in that activity by relatives who bought him feminine outfits and gold ornaments, to suit his own relatively feminine body and psyche.

One can very well see from the extant photograph of Ramakrishna [e.g., online at Ramakrishna (2003)] he possessed quite well-formed and firm breasts—most possibly a case of *gynecomastia*....

Ramakrishna could also be described, in the jargon of modern medical psychology, as a “she male,” that is, a male who, despite his male genitalia, possesses a female psyche and breasts resembling those of a woman....

[Saradananda] writes, apparently on the basis of the Master’s testimony, that he used to bleed every month from the region of his pubic hair ... and the bleeding continued for three days just like the menstrual period of women (Sil, 1998).

Nor was that the extent of the great sage’s appreciation for the microcosmic aspects of the feminine principle:

Once he sat after a midday siesta with his loin cloth disheveled. He then remarked that he was sitting like a woman about to suckle her baby. In fact, he used to suckle his young beloved [male] disciple Rakhai Ghosh....

He ... exhibited his frankly erotic behavior toward his male devotees and disciples.... He often posed as their girlfriend or mother and always touched or caressed them lovingly (Sil, 1998).

Anyone who is suckling an adult is explicitly viewing/treating that adult as a child. If there is any sexual attraction at all from the “parent” to the “child” in such a context, there is no escaping the obvious psychological pedophilic component, even if the suckled one is of legal age, as was the eighteen-year-old Ghosh. And if one grown man (a “she-male,” in Ramakrishna’s case) is having another grown man (his junior) pretend to be an infant, so that the first of them can pretend to be the mother to the second, and liter-

ally suckle the second, in any other context there would be no doubt at all as to the fetishistic nature of the behavior.

Further, after having met his foremost disciple, Vivekananda, for the first time, in the throes of an “agonizing desire” to see the young man again, Ramakrishna confessed:

I ran to the northern quarter of the garden, a rather unfrequented place, and there cried at the top of my voice, “O my darling, come back to me! I can’t live without seeing you!” After some time, I felt better. This state of things continued for *six months*. There were other boys who also came here; I felt greatly drawn towards some of them but nothing like the way I was attracted toward [Vivekananda] (Disciples, 1979; italics added).

Ramakrishna went on to describe his favorite disciple variously as a “huge red-eyed carp,” “a very large pot,” “a big bamboo with holes” and a “male pigeon.”

In later days, the prematurely impotent, married guru once went into *samadhi* (i.e., mystical ecstasy, generally involving a loss of awareness of the body) after having mounted the young Vivekananda’s back.

As to what excuse the great guru might have given for such mounting had it *not* sent him vaulting into ecstatic perception of God, one can only guess.

[W]e cannot ignore [Ramakrishna’s] obsession with the anus and shit in his conversations. Even the experience of his highest realization that there exists within the individual self the *Paramatman*, the repository of all knowledge, was derived from his beholding a grasshopper with a thin stick-like object inserted in its anus!....

His ecstasy [i.e., as trance] was induced by touching his favorite young [male] devotees. He developed a few strategies for touching or petting the body (occasionally the penis, as was the case with Vijaykrishna Goswami, whose cock he calmed by his “touch”) of devotees (Sil, 1998).

Of course, none of Ramakrishna’s documented homoerotic behaviors in the above regards would equate to him having been a practicing homosexual. They equally, however, cannot be unrelated to his own view of the female body as being nothing more than “such things as blood, flesh, fat, entrails, worms, piss, shit, and the

like” (in [Nikhilananda, 1984](#)). Indeed, the “incarnation of the Divine Mother” himself divulged:

I am terribly scared of women.... I see them as a tigress coming to devour me. Besides, I see large pores [cf. vagina symbols] in their limbs. I find all of them as ogres....

If my body is touched by a woman I feel sick.... The touched part aches as if stung by a horned catfish (in [Nikhilananda, 1984](#)).

Even the mere sight of a woman could reportedly so negatively excite Ramakrishna as to prompt him to

either run to the temple or invoke the strategy of escape by getting into *samadhi*. His attraction for young boys that may be considered as muted pedophilia is often associated with aging impotent males....

Ramakrishna’s contempt for women was basically a misogynist attitude of an insecure male, who thought of himself as a woman in order to fight his innate fear of the female (Sil, 1998).

On other occasions, the mention of any object which Ramakrishna did not desire (e.g., hemp, wine) would send him fleeing into *samadhi*; as could strong emotion (e.g., anger) on the sage’s part. At his cousin’s suggestion that those odd behaviors might have been psychologically based, Ramakrishna “responded by almost jumping into the river in order to end it all” (in Sil, 1998).

* * *

With those various factors acting, it should not surprise that Ramakrishna’s own spiritual discipline took several odd turns.

During his ascetic practices, Ramakrishna exhibited remarkable bodily changes. While worshiping Rama as his devotee Hanuman, the monkey chieftain of the Ramayana, his movements resembled those of a monkey.... [Ramakrishna was also an accomplished childhood actor.] In his biography of Ramakrishna, novelist Christopher Isherwood paraphrased the saint’s own description of his strange behavior: “I didn’t do this of my own accord; it happened of itself. And the most marvelous thing was—the lower end of my spine lengthened, nearly an inch! Later, when I stopped practicing

this kind of devotion, it gradually went back to its normal size” (Murphy, 1992).

During the days of my [“holy”] madness [as priest of the Kali temple in Dakshineswar] I used to worship my own penis as the Shiva *linga*.... Worship of a live *linga*. I even decorated it with a pearl (in Nikhilananda, 1984).

Nor was the sage’s manner of worship confined to his own genitalia:

[Ramakrishna] considered swear words [to be] as meaningful as the Vedas and the Puranas and was particularly fond of performing *japa* (ritual counting of rosary) by muttering the word “cunt” (Sil, 1998).

Indeed, as the claimed avatar himself told his devotees:

The moment I utter the word “cunt” I behold the cosmic vagina ... and I sink into it (in Sil, 1998).

That is actually not quite as odd as it might initially seem, for “cunt” itself derives from *Kunda* or *Cunti*—names for Kali, the Hindu Divine Mother goddess, beloved of Ramakrishna.

It is still plenty odd, though.

In any case, in 1861 the recently wedded Ramakrishna began tantric (sexual) yoga practice with a female teacher, Yogeshwari. (His marriage was actually to a five-year-old child bride, chosen by the twenty-three-year-old yogi himself, and then left with her parents to mature.) Rituals performed by the eager student during that *sadhana* (i.e., spiritual practice/discipline) included eating the culinary leftovers from the meals of dogs and jackals. Also, consuming a “fish and human meat preparation in a human skull” (Sil, 1998). Attempts to have him participate in the ritual sex with a consort which is an essential component of tantra, however, were less successful. Indeed, they ended with the sage himself falling safely into trance, and later simply witnessing *other* practitioners having ritual intercourse.

Comparably, upon his wife’s coming of age, Ramakrishna tried but failed to make love to her, instead involuntarily plunging into a “premature superconsciousness.” (Their marriage was actually, it appears, never consummated.) That, however, did not discourage the young woman from staking her own spiritual claims:

[W]hile regarding her husband as God, Sarada came to be convinced that as his wedded wife she must also be divine. Following her husband's claim that she was actually Shiva's wife, Sarada later claimed: "I am Bhagavati, the Divine Mother of the Universe" (Sil, 1998).

Such was evidently the compensation for her being confined to the kitchen for days at a time by her husband, cooking, not even being allowed to relieve herself in the latrine.

* * *

[Ramakrishna was] one of the truly great saints of nineteenth-century India (Feuerstein, 1992).

In a demonstration of the high regard with which every loyal disciple holds his or her guru, Vivekananda himself declared that Ramakrishna was "the greatest of all avatars" (Sil, 1997). That evaluation, however, was not shared by everyone who knew the great sage:

Hriday, the Master's nephew and companion, actually regarded him [as] a moron (Sil, 1998).

The venerated guru later formed the same opinion of his own earthly mother.

In any case, as part of his alleged avatarhood, Ramakrishna was christened with the title "Paramahansa," meaning "Supreme Swan." The appellation itself signifies the highest spiritual attainment and discrimination, by analogy with the swan which, it is claimed, is able to extract only the milk from a mixture of milk and water (presumably by curdling it).

In mid-1885, Ramakrishna was diagnosed with throat cancer. He died in 1886, leaving several thousand disciples (Satchidananda, 1977). As expected, Vivekananda took over leadership of those devotees.

After all that, Sil (1998) gave his summary evaluation of "the incarnation [of God or the Divine Mother] for the modern age," concluding that, the swooning Ramakrishna's status as a monumental cultural icon notwithstanding, he was nevertheless "a bit of a baby and a bit of a booby."

CHAPTER III

THE HANDSOME DUCKLING

(SWAMI VIVEKANANDA)

[Vivekananda] is seen not just as a patriot-prophet of resurgent India but much more—an incarnation of Shiva, Buddha and Jesus (Sil, 1997).

Perfect from his birth, [Vivekananda] did not need spiritual disciplines for his own liberation. Whatever disciplines he practiced were for the purpose of removing the veil that concealed, for the time being, his true divine nature and mission in the world. Even before his birth, the Lord had chosen him as His instrument to help Him in the spiritual redemption of humanity (Nikhilananda, 1996).

BORN IN 1863 IN CALCUTTA, Vivekananda began meditating at age seven, and claimed to have first experienced *samadhi* when eight years old.

He regarded himself as a *brahmachari*, a celibate student of the Hindu tradition, who worked hard, prized ascetic disci-

plines, held holy things in reverence, and enjoyed clean words, thoughts, and acts (Nikhilananda, 1996).

A handsome and muscular, albeit somewhat stout and bulldog-jawed youth, he first met his guru, Ramakrishna, in 1881 at age eighteen. As the favorite and foremost disciple of that “Supreme Swan,” the young “Duckling,” Vivekananda,

was constantly flattered and petted by his frankly enchanted homoerotic mentor [i.e., Ramakrishna], fed adoringly by him, made to sing songs on a fairly regular basis for the Master’s mystical merriment, and told by the older man that he was a ... realized individual through his meditations ... [an] eternally realized person ... free from the lure of ... woman and wealth (Sil, 1997).

Vivekanandaji took his monastic vows in 1886, shortly before his guru’s death, thereby becoming a swami. (The suffix “ji” is added to East Indian names and titles to show respect.) “Swami” itself—meaning “to be master of one’s self”—is simply the name of the monastic order established by Shankara in the thirteenth century. The adoption of that honorific entails taking formal vows of celibacy and poverty.

Interestingly, in later years, Vivekananda actually claimed to be the reincarnation of Shankara (Sil, 1997).

In any case, following a dozen years of increasing devotion to his dearly departed guru, Vivekananda came to America at age thirty. There, he represented Hinduism to American men and women at the 1893 Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago.

A total stranger to the world of extroverted, educated, and affluent women, he was charmed by their generosity, kindness, and frankly unqualified admiration for and obsession with a handsome, young, witty, and somewhat enchantingly naïve virgin male from a distant land (Sil, 1997).

The earlier-celebrated purity and enjoyment of “clean acts,” and “freedom from the lure of women” guaranteed to Vivekananda by Ramakrishna, would nevertheless at first glance appear to have been somewhat incomplete. For, the former once admitted that, following the death of his father in 1884,

he visited brothels and consumed alcoholic beverages in the company of his friends (Sil, 1997).

Thankfully for his legacy, though, Vivekananda was not actually partaking of the various ladies' delights in those houses. Rather, by his own testimony, he was simply dragged there once by his friends, who hoped to cheer him up after his father's death. He, however, after a few drinks, began lecturing to them about what might become of them in their afterlives for such debauchery. He was subsequently kicked out by his friends for being that "wet blanket," and stumbled home alone, thoroughly drunk (Sil, 2004).

So it was just a few drinks too many. In a whorehouse. Nothing unexpected from a savior "chosen by God as His instrument to help Him" in the salvation of humanity.

Either way, though, "if you keep on playing with fire" you're going to get burned, as Vivekananda himself observed:

Once in me rose the feeling of lust. I got so disgusted with myself that I sat on a pot of burning tinders, and it took a long time for the wound to heal (in Sil, 1997).

* * *

[I]t is my ambition to conquer the world by Hindu thought—to see Hindus from the North Pole to the South Pole (Vivekananda, in [Sil, 1997]).

It was not long after that announcement that Vivekananda was proudly claiming to have "helped on the tide of Vedanta which is flooding the world." He was likewise soon predicting that "before ten years elapse a vast majority of the English people will be Vedantic" (in Sil, 1997).

The enthusiastic young monk's hopes of effecting global change, further, were not limited to a spiritual revolution, of "Hindus 'round the world." Rather, among his other vast dreams were those of a socially progressive, economically sovereign and politically stable India (Sil, 1997).

The realization of those goals, however, was to come up against certain concrete realities not anticipated by the swami, including the need to think ahead in manifesting one's ideas. Indeed, Vivekananda was, it seems, explicitly opposed to such an approach:

Plans! Plans! That is why you Western people can never create a religion! If any of you ever did, it was only a few Catholic saints who had no plans. Religion was never, never preached by planners! (in Nikhilananda, 1996).

Not surprisingly, then, given this antipathy, before the end of 1897 Vivekananda was already down-sizing his goals:

I have roused a good many of our people, and that was all I wanted (in Nikhilananda, 1996).

Further, as Chelishev (1987) observed with regard to the social improvements advocated by the naïve monk:

Vivekananda approached the solution of the problem of social inequality from the position of Utopian Socialism, placing hopes on the good will and magnanimity of the propertied classes.

Understandably, within a year the swami had realized the futility of that approach:

I have given up at present my plan for the education of the masses (in Sil, 1997).

It will come by degrees. What I now want is a band of fiery missionaries. We must have a College in Madras to teach comparative religions ... we must have a press, and papers printed in English and in the vernaculars (Vivekananda, 1947).

As one frustrated devotee finally put it:

Swami had good ideas—plenty—but he carried nothing out He only talked (in Sil, 1997).

* * *

Vivekananda claimed to have experienced, in 1898, a vision of Shiva Himself. In that ecstasy, he “had been granted the grace of Amarnath, the Lord of Immortality, not to die until he himself willed it” (Nikhilananda, 1996).

The chain-smoking, diabetic sage, apparently “going gentle into that dark night,” nevertheless passed away only a few years

later, in 1902, after years of declining health. Reaching only an unripe age of thirty-nine, he “thus fulfill[ed] his own prophecy: ‘I shall not live to be forty years old’” (Nikhilananda, 1996).

Of course, there are prophecies, and then there are earlier prophecies:

Vivekananda declared solemnly: “This time I will give hundred years to my body.... This time I have to perform many difficult tasks.... In this life I shall demonstrate my powers much more than I did in my past life” (Sil, 1997).

* * *

In spite of those many reversals, Vivekananda foresaw great and lasting effects on the world for his teachings:

The spiritual ideals emanating from the Belur Math [one of Vivekananda’s monasteries/universities], he once said to Miss MacLeod, would influence the thought-currents of the world for 1100 years....

“All these visions are rising before me”—these were his very words (Nikhilananda, 1996).

The Vedanta Society which preserves Vivekananda’s brand of Hinduism has a current membership of only around 22,000 individuals, and a dozen centers worldwide. It would thus not likely qualify as any large part of the “global spiritual renaissance” grandly and grandiosely envisioned by the swami. The better part of Vivekananda’s actual legacy, then, beyond mere organizational PR, may consist simply in his having paved the way for the other Eastern teachers who followed him into America in the succeeding century.

CHAPTER IV

MOTHER DEAREST

(AUROBINDO)

When it was also understood in the East that the Great Chain [or ontological hierarchy of Being, manifesting through causal, astral and physical realms] did indeed unfold or evolve over time, the great Aurobindo expounded the notion with an *unequalled genius* (Wilber, 2000a; italics added).

IN “SIDEBAR A” TO HIS *BOOMERITIS* novel—originally written as a non-fiction work—Ken Wilber (2002), the “Einstein of consciousness research,” has one of that book’s characters refer to Aurobindo (1872 – 1950) as “the world’s greatest philosopher-sage.” Even in his much earlier (1980) *Atman Project*, he already had Aurobindo designated as “India’s greatest modern sage.” And, more recently, in his foreword to A. S. Dalal’s (2000) *A Greater Psychology*, he has again averred that “Sri Aurobindo Ghose was India’s greatest modern philosopher-sage.” Likewise, in his own (2000) *Integral Psychology*, he has Aurobindo appointed as India’s “greatest modern philosopher-sage.”

So, if there’s one thing we can safely conclude....

The yogic scholar Georg Feuerstein, among others, fully shares Wilber's complimentary evaluation of Aurobindo. Agehananda Bharati (1976), however, offered a somewhat different perspective:

I do not agree with much of what he said; and I believe his *Life Divine* ... could be condensed to about one-fifth of its size without any substantial loss of content and message.... [Q]uite tedious reading for all those who have done mystical and religious reading all their lives, but fascinating and full of proselytizing vigor for those who haven't, who want something of the spirit, and who are impressionable.

Bharati himself was both a scholar and a swami of the Ramakrishna Order.

Aurobindo, in any case, whether a "great philosopher" or not, could well be viewed as having wobbled mightily about the center, if one were to consider his purported contributions to the Allied World War II effort:

Sri Aurobindo put all his [e.g., astral] Force behind the Allies and especially Churchill. One particular event in which he had a hand was the successful evacuation from Dunkirk. As some history books note, the German forces refrained "for inexplicable reasons" from a quick advance which would have been fatal for the Allies ([Huchzermeyer, 1998](#)).

Other admirers of Aurobindo (e.g., [GuruNet, 2003](#)) regard that Allied escape as being aided by a fog which the yogi explicitly helped, through his powers of consciousness, to roll in over the water, concealing the retreating forces.

Aurobindo's spiritual partner, "the Mother," is likewise believed to have advanced the wartime labor via metaphysical means:

Due to her occult faculties the Mother was able to look deep into Hitler's being and she saw that he was in contact with an *asura* [astral demon] who is at the origin of wars and makes every possible effort to prevent the advent of world unity ([Huchzermeyer, 1998](#)).

When Hitler was gaining success after success and Mother was trying in the opposite direction, she said the shining be-

ing who was guiding Hitler used to come to the ashram from time to time to see what was happening. Things changed from bad to worse. Mother decided on a fresh strategy. She took on the appearance of that shining being, appeared before Hitler and advised him to attack Russia. On her way back to the ashram, she met that being. The being was intrigued by Mother having stolen a march over him. Hitler's attack on Russia ensured his downfall....

Mother saw in her meditation some Chinese people had reached Calcutta and recognized the danger of that warning. Using her occult divine power, she removed the danger from the subtle realms. Much later when the Chinese army was edging closer to India's border, a shocked India did not know which way to turn. The Chinese decided on their own to withdraw, much to the world's surprise. Mother had prevented them from advancing against India by canceling their power in the subtle realms (MSS, 2003).

Nor were those successful attempts at saving the world from the clutches of evil even the most impressive of the Mother's claimed subtle activities:

She had live contacts with several gods. Durga used to come to Mother's meditations regularly. Particularly during the Durga Puja when Mother gave *darshan*, Durga used to come a day in advance. On one occasion, Mother explained to Durga the significance of surrender to the Supreme. Durga said because she herself was a goddess, it never struck her that she should surrender to a higher power. Mother showed Durga the progress she could make by surrendering to the Supreme. Durga was agreeable and offered her surrender to the Divine (MSS, 2003).

The Mother further believed herself to have been, in past lives, Queen Elizabeth of England—the sixteenth-century daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. Also, Catherine of Russia (wife of Peter the Great), an Egyptian Queen, the mother of Moses, and Joan of Arc.

Her diary entries reveal that even during her illness she continued through her *sadhana* to exert an occult influence on men and events (Nirodbaran, 1990).

[The Mother] is the Divine Mother [i.e., as an incarnation or avatar] who has consented to put on her the cloak of obscurity and suffering and ignorance so that she can effectively lead us—human beings—to Knowledge and Bliss and Ananda and to the Supreme Lord (in Aurobindo, 1953).

In the person of [the Mother], Aurobindo thus saw the descent of the Supermind. He believed she was its *avatara* or descent into the Earth plane. As the incarnate Supermind she was changing the consciousness on which the Earth found itself, and as such *her work was infallible....* She does not merely embody the Divine, he instructed one follower, but is in reality the Divine appearing to be human (Minor, 1999; italics added).

India's independence from British rule followed soon after the end of WWII. Aurobindo himself marked the occasion in public speech:

August 15th, 1947 is the birthday of free India. It marks for her the end of an old era, the beginning of a new age....

August 15th is my own birthday and it is naturally gratifying to me that it should have assumed this vast significance. I take this coincidence, not as a fortuitous accident, but as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force that guides my steps on the work with which I began life, the beginning of its full fruition (in Nirodbaran, 1990).

This, then, on top of his believed Allied war efforts, was the grandiose state of mind of “the world's greatest philosopher-sage.” Note further that this, like the Mother's diary entries, was Aurobindo's own documented claim, not merely a possible exaggeration made on his behalf by his followers. For all of the private hubris and narcissism of our world's guru-figures, it is rare for any of them to so brazenly exhibit the same publicly, as in the above inflations.

And, as always, there are ways of ensuring loyalty to the guru and his Mother, as Aurobindo (1953; italics added) himself noted:

[A student] had been progressing extremely well because he opened himself to the Mother; but if he allows stupidities like [an unspecified, uncomplimentary remark made by an-

other devotee about the Mother] to enter his mind, it may influence him, close him to the Mother and stop his progress.

As for [the disciple who made the “imbecilic” remark], if he said and thought a thing like that (about the Mother) *it explains why he has been suffering in health so much lately*. If one makes oneself a mouthpiece of the hostile forces and lends oneself to their falsehoods, it is not surprising that something in him should get out of order.

To a follower who later asked, “What is the best means for the *sadhaks* [disciples] to avoid suffering due to the action of the hostile forces?” Aurobindo (1953; italics added) replied: “Faith in the Mother and *complete surrender*.”

[Physical nearness to the Mother, e.g., via living in the ashram] is indispensable for the fullness of the *sadhana* on the physical plane. Transformation of the physical and external being *is not possible otherwise* [italics added] (Aurobindo, 1953).

Such teachings, of course, provide a compelling reason to stay in the ashram. In all such cases, whatever the original motivations of the leaders in emphasizing such constraints may have been, there is an obvious effect in practice. That is, an effect of making their disciples afraid to leave their communities, or even to question the “infallibility” of the “enlightened” leaders in question.

As with other important spiritual action figures, of course, the exalted philosopher-sage known as Aurobindo did not evolve to that point without having achieved greatness in previous lives:

Sri Aurobindo was known in his ashram as the rebirth of Napoleon. Napoleon’s birthday was also August 15th.... In his previous births, it was believed he was Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Krishna and many other persons too. Someone asked Sri Aurobindo whether he had been Shakespeare as well, but could not elicit an answer (GuruNet, 2003).

Being an incarnation of Krishna would, of course, have made Aurobindo an avatar, as he himself indeed explicitly claimed (1953) to be regardless. As we will see more of later, however, there is competition among other spiritual paths for many of those same reincarnational honors.

Further, da Vinci lived from 1452 to 1519, while Michelangelo walked this Earth from 1475 to 1564. Given the chronological overlap between those two lives, this reincarnation, if taken as true, could thus only have been “one soul incarnating/emanating in two bodies.” That is, it could not have been da Vinci himself reincarnating as Michelangelo. Thus, the latter’s skills could not have been based on the “past life” work of the former.

Or perhaps no one ever bothered to simply look up the relevant dates, before making and publicizing those extravagant claims.

At any rate, the purported da Vinci connection does not end there:

[E]arly in 1940, [a disciple of Aurobindo’s] came in and showed the Mother a print of the celebrated “Mona Lisa,” and the following brief conversation ensued:

Mother: Sri Aurobindo was the artist.

Champaklal: Leonardo da Vinci?

Mother smiled sweetly and said: yes.

Champaklal: Mother, it seems this [painting] is yours?

Mother: Yes, do you not see the resemblance? (Light, 2003).

Evidently, then, not only was Aurobindo allegedly the reincarnation of Leonardo da Vinci, but his spiritual partner, the Mother, claimed to be the subject of the Mona Lisa portrait.

“Since the beginning of earthly history,” the Mother explained, “Sri Aurobindo has always presided over the great earthly transformations, under one form or another, under one name or another” (Paine, 1998).

For my own part, however, statements such as that remind me of nothing so much as my own growing up with a hyperactive cousin who could not stop arguing about which was the “strongest dinosaur.” My own attitude to such conversations is simply: “Please, stop. Please.”

In any case, even such “great earthly transformers” as Aurobindo still evidently stand “on the shoulders of other spiritual giants”:

It is a fact that I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me for a fortnight in the jail [in 1908]

in my solitary mediation and felt his presence (Aurobindo, 1953).

Aurobindo and his Mother again claimed to have single-handedly turned the tide of WWII, and asserted that the former sage has “presided over the great earthly transformations” for time immemorial. If one believes that, the impressiveness of the spirit of Vivekananda allegedly visiting him in prison would pale by comparison. The same would be true for the idea of Aurobindo being “the world’s greatest philosopher-sage.” For, the yogi made *far* more grandiose claims himself, and indeed could therefore have easily taken such contemporary recognition of his greatness as being little more than “damning with faint praise.”

At any rate, short of believing that Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s vital roles in WWII were exactly what they themselves claimed those to be, there are only two possible conclusions. That is, that both he and she were wildly deluded, and unable to distinguish fact from fiction or reality from their own fantasies; or that they were both outright fabricating their own life-myths.

So: Do *you* believe that one “world’s greatest philosopher-sage” and his “infallible” spiritual partner—who herself “had live contacts with several gods,” *teaching them* in the process—in southern India radically changed the course of human history in unparalleled ways, simply via their use of metaphysical Force and other occult faculties?

I, personally, do not.

There is, of course, competition for the title of “India’s greatest modern sage.” For example, in his foreword to Inner Directions’ recent (2000) reissue of *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*, Wilber himself had given comparably high praise to Ramana:

“*Talks*” is the living voice of the *greatest sage* [italics added] of the twentieth century.

That feting comes, predictably, in spite of Wilber’s having never sat with, or even met, Maharshi, knowing him only through his extant, edited writings.

One may well be impressed by Maharshi’s “unadorned, bottom-line” mysticism of simply inquiring, of himself, “Who am I?”—in the attempt to “slip into the witnessing Self.” Likewise, his claim that “Love is not different from the Self ... the Self is love” (in

Walsh, 1999) is sure to make one feel warm and fuzzy inside. Nevertheless, the man was not without his eccentricities:

[T]he Indian sage Ramana Maharshi once told Paul Brunton that he had visions of cities beneath the sacred mountain of Arunachala where he resided all his adult life (Feuerstein, 1998).

Indeed, in Talk 143 from Volume 1 of the infamous *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (2000)—the very text upon which Wilber has above commented—we find:

In visions I have seen caves, cities with streets, etc., and a whole world in it... All the *siddhas* [“perfected beings”] are reputed to be there.

Were such subterranean cities to be taken as existing on the *physical* level, however, they could not so exist now or in the past without previous, historic “Golden Ages” and their respective civilizations, with those civilizations being more advanced than our own. That idea, however, is generally explicitly taken as being the product only of magical/mythical thinking and the like:

[T]he romantic transcendentalists ... usually confuse average-mode consciousness and growing-tip consciousness, or average lower and truly advanced, [and] use that confusion to claim that the past epochs were some sort of Golden Age which we have subsequently destroyed. They confuse magic and psychic, myth and subtle archetype (Wilber, 1983a).

The question then becomes: Do *you* believe that “all the *siddhas*” are living in (even astral) cities and caves, beneath one particular mountain in India? (Mountains are actually regarded as holy in cultures throughout the world, and as being symbols of the astral spine. To take their holiness and “natural abode of souls” nature *literally*, however, is *highly* unusual.) If not, was the “greatest sage of the century” hallucinating? If so....

Or, even if not:

All the food [in Maharshi’s ashram] was prepared by *brahmins* so that it should remain uncontaminated by contact with lower castes and foreigners....

“Bhagavan always insisted on caste observances in the ashram here, though he was not rigidly orthodox” [said Miss Merston, a long-time devotee of Maharshi] (Marshall, 1963).

[Maharshi] allowed himself to be worshiped like a Buddha (Daniélou, 1987).

“Greatest sage”—for whom “the Self is love,” but lower castes and foreigners evidently aren’t, in spite of his supposed impartial witnessing of all things equally, and in spite of the fact that he was not otherwise “rigidly orthodox” or bent on following religious prescriptions.

Sadly, as we shall see, that sort of brutal inconsistency should be no less than expected from the “great spiritual personages” of our world.

CHAPTER V

THE KRINSH

(JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI)

The messiah, or World Teacher, was made to correspond with the traditional Hindu figure of the Avatar, a deific person sent to the world at certain crucial times to watch over the dawn of a new religious era (Vernon, 2001).

No one used that term [i.e., “World Teacher”] in my childhood. As I could not pronounce his name, Krishnamurti, he was known to me always, as Krinsh (Sloss, 2000).

Madame B
Down in Adyar
Liked the Masters a lot ...
But the Krinsh,
Who lived out in Ojai,
Did NOT!

JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI WAS DISCOVERED as a teenage boy by Charles Leadbeater of the Theosophical Society, on a beach in Madras, India, in 1909.

The Theosophical Society itself had been founded in New York City by the east-European “seer” Madame Helena P. Blavatsky (HPB), in 1875. Its membership soon numbered over 100,000; an Asian headquarters was established in Adyar, India, in 1882.

The Theosophical Society ... was at first enormously successful and attracted converts of the intellectual stature of the inventor Thomas Edison and Darwin’s friend and collaborator Alfred Russel Wallace (Storr, 1996).

No less an authority than [Zen scholar] D. T. Suzuki was prepared to say that [Blavatsky’s] explication of Buddhist teachings in *The Voice of Silence* ... testified to an initiation into “the deeper side of Mahayana doctrine” (Oldmeadow, 2004).

Perhaps. And yet—

W. E. Coleman has shown that [Blavatsky’s *Isis Unveiled*] comprises a sustained and frequent plagiarism of about one hundred contemporary texts, chiefly relating to ancient and exotic religions, demonology, Freemasonry and the case for spiritualism....

[*The Secret Doctrine*] betrayed her plagiarism again but now her sources were mainly contemporary works on Hinduism and modern science (Goodrick-Clarke, 2004).

Interestingly, when Blavatsky and her co-founder, Colonel Henry Olcott, sailed to India in 1879, the man whom they left in charge of the Theosophical Society in America was one Abner Doubleday, the inventor of baseball (Fields, 1992).

Blavatsky herself taught the existence of a hierarchy of “Ascended Masters,” included among them one Lord Maitreya, the World Teacher whose incarnations had allegedly included both Krishna and Jesus. Those same Masters, however, were modeled on real figures from public life, e.g., on individuals involved in East Indian political reform (Vernon, 2001). They were fraudulently contacted in other ways as well:

[Blavatsky’s housekeeper, Emma Cutting, demonstrated] how she and HPB had made a doll together, which they ... manipulated on a long bamboo pole in semi-darkness to provide the Master’s alleged apparitions. Emma had also

dropped “precipitated” letters on to Theosophical heads from holes in the ceiling, while her husband had made sliding panels and hidden entrances into the shrine room [adjoining HPB’s bedroom] to facilitate Blavatsky’s comings and goings and make possible the substitution of all the brooches, dishes and other objects that she used in her demonstrations [i.e., as purported materializations or “apports”]....

The Russian journalist V. S. Solovieff claimed to have caught [Blavatsky] red-handed with the silver bells which produced astral music [in séances].... Blavatsky confessed to Solovieff quite bluntly that the phenomena were fraudulent, adding that one must deceive men in order to rule them ([Washington, 1995](#)).

Madame Blavatsky died in 1891. Prior to that passing, however, Leadbeater had already begun claiming to channel messages himself, from Blavatsky’s fabricated “Masters.”

The famously clairvoyant Leadbeater, further, had before (and after) been accused of indecent behavior toward a series of adolescent males:

One of Leadbeater’s favorite boys [accused him] of secretly teaching boys to masturbate under cover of occult training, and insinuat[ed] that masturbation was only the prelude to the gratifying of homosexual lust ([Washington, 1995](#)).

In any case, the young “Krishna on the Beach” was no typical teenager, in need of such mundane lessons, as the clairvoyant well noted. Indeed, upon examining his aura, Leadbeater found Krishnamurti to be a highly refined soul, apparently completely free of selfishness, i.e., ego.

Krishnamurti was soon thereafter declared by Leadbeater to be the current “vehicle” for Lord Maitreya, and schooled accordingly within the Theosophical ranks. (An American boy had earlier been advanced for the same position by Leadbeater, but the latter appears to have “changed his mind” in that regard. Later, Leadbeater was to propose yet another East Indian youth for the title of World Teacher. That boy, Rajagopal, went on to manage Krishnamurti’s financial affairs, while his wife handled Jiddu’s other affairs, as we shall see.)

The brothers [i.e., Krishnamurti and his younger sibling] no doubt found Leadbeater’s swings of temperament confusing.

One moment they would be adored, pampered, idolized, and the next scolded for breaching some piece of esoteric etiquette they did not understand (Vernon, 2001).

Throughout this book, we shall see many examples of students and disciples being placed in comparable situations by their teachers and guru-figures. In such psychological binds, persons for whom it is vitally important to earn the approval of their “master” are rather unable to discern how to gain that reward, with often-tragic results. There are, indeed, two possible extreme reactions to such intermittent reward/punishment, where one cannot ascertain the conditions by which the reward will be earned or the punishment given. That is, one can either simply drop all of one’s reactions and live in “choiceless awareness” of the moment; or, more often, evolve that impossibility of “guessing right” into neuroses, violence or extreme depression.

Indeed, relevant experiments have been done by students of Pavlov himself (Winn, 2000), wherein dogs were first taught, via reward and punishment, to distinguish between circles and ellipses. Then, the circles were gradually flattened, and the ellipses made rounder, until the experimental subjects could no longer distinguish between them. The dogs were thus unable to give the “correct response” to earn a corresponding prize, instead being rewarded and punished “randomly.” The effect on the animals was that initially happy and excitable dogs became violent, biting their experimenters. Other previously “laid back, carefree” animals, by contrast, became lethargic, not caring about anything.

At any rate, even prior to being discovered by Leadbeater, while still in India’s public school system, Krishnamurti’s own education had been a traumatic experience:

Never one to endear himself to schoolmasters, Krishna was punished brutally for his inadequacies and branded an imbecile (Vernon, 2001).

He was caned almost every day for being unable to learn his lessons. Half his time at school was spent in tears on the veranda (Lutyens, 1975).

Not surprisingly, then, in later years Krishnamurti evinced little regard for academic accomplishments:

[The Nobel-caliber physicist David Bohm] spoke of the humiliation he had experienced at the hands of Krishnamurti who, in his presence, made cutting jokes about “professors” and did not acknowledge the importance of Bohm’s work....

He suffered greatly under [Krishnamurti’s] disrespect of him, which at times was blatantly obvious (Peat, 1997).

* * *

Krishnamurti’s contemporary appearance on Earth offered hope to Theosophists for the “salvation of mankind.” After years of being groomed for his role as their World Teacher, however, Krishnamurti’s faith in the protection of Theosophy’s Masters, and Lead-beater’s guiding visions of the same, was shattered in 1925 by the unexpected death of his own younger brother. (Jiddu had previously been assured, in his own believed meetings with the Masters on the astral plane, that his brother would survive the relevant illness.) Thereafter, he viewed those visions, including his own, as being merely personal wish-fulfillments, and considered the occult hierarchy of Masters to be irrelevant (Vernon, 2001).

That, however, did not imply any rejection of mysticism in general, on Krishnamurti’s part:

By the autumn of 1926 [following an alleged kundalini awakening which began in 1922] Krishna made it clear ... that a metamorphosis had taken place. [The kundalini is a subtle energy believed to reside at the base of the spine. When “awakened” and directed up the spine into the brain, it produces ecstatic spiritual realization.] His former personality had been stripped away, leaving him in a state of constant and irreversible union with the godhead (Vernon, 2001).

Or, as Krishnamurti (1969) himself put it, in openly proclaiming his status as World Teacher:

I have become one with the Beloved. I have been made simple. I have become glorified because of Him.

[Krishnamurti] maintained that his consciousness was merged with his beloved, by which he meant all of creation (Sloss, 2000).

In August of 1929, reasoning that organizations inherently condition and restrict Truth, the thirty-four-year-old Krishnamurti

formally dissolved the Theosophical Society's "Order of the Star" branch, which he had previously headed since 1911.

Even there, however, it was more the organization and its "Ascended Master"-based philosophy, rather than his own role as World Teacher or Messiah, that was being repudiated. Krishnamurti himself explained as much after the dissolution:

When it becomes necessary for humanity to receive in a new form the ancient wisdom, someone whose duty it is to repeat these truths is incarnated (in Michel, 1992).

Or, as Vernon (2001) confirmed:

[Krishnamurti] never went as far as to deny being the World Teacher, just that it made no difference who or what he was.

In 1932, Krishnamurti and Rajagopal's wife began an affair which would last for more than twenty-five years. The woman, Rosalind, became pregnant on several occasions, suffering miscarriages and at least two covert/illegal abortions. The oddity of that relationship is not lessened by Jiddu's earlier regard for the same woman. For, both he and his brother believed that Rosalind was the reincarnation of their long-lost mother ... in spite of the fact that the latter had only died two years *after* Rosalind was born (Sloss, 2000).

In the late 1930s, Krishnamurti retired to Ojai, California, becoming close friends with Aldous Huxley. Being thus affectionate, however, did not stop Jiddu from insultingly regarding Huxley, behind his back, as having a mind "like a wastebasket" (Sloss, 2000). Huxley in turn, after hearing Krishnamurti speak in Switzerland in 1961, wrote of that lecture: "It was like listening to a discourse of the Buddha" (in Peat, 1997). Further, when Aldous' house and library were lost in a fire, Krishnamurti's *Commentaries on Living* were the first of the books he replaced.

"Wastebasket," indeed.

With his proximity to northern Los Angeles, Jiddu also visited with composer Igor Stravinsky, writer Thomas Mann and philosopher-mathematician Bertrand Russell, and picnicked with screen legends Greta Garbo and Charlie Chaplin.

The continuing affair with Rosalind was, not surprisingly, less than completely in line with the quasi-Messiah's own teachings:

Krishnamurti had occasionally told young people that celibacy was significant, indicating that it encouraged the generation of great energy and intensity that could lead to psychological transformation. Krishnamurti seems to have raised the matter with [David] Bohm as well, and the physicist believed that the Indian teacher led a celibate life (Peat, 1997).

Bohm first met Krishnamurti in 1961, and went on to become easily the most famous of his followers (until their distancing from each other in 1984), co-authoring several books of dialogs on spiritual topics with Jiddu. Bohm further sat as a trustee on the board of a Krishnamurti-founded school in England, and was viewed by many as potentially being the Krishnamurti's "successor."

Consequently, apologetic protests that Krishnamurti's behavior with Rosalind was "not dishonest/hypocritical," simply for him not having spent his entire life preaching the benefits of celibacy or marriage, ring hollow. On the contrary, if we are to believe Peat's report that Krishnamurti "had spoken to Bohm of the importance of celibacy," there absolutely *was* a contradiction between Krishnamurti's teachings and his life. That is so even though the quarter-century affair with Rosalind, hidden for whatever reasons, had ended by the time he met Bohm.

Given that, the only possible verdict regarding Krishnamurti's behavior is that of obvious hypocrisy.

* * *

Considering Krishnamurti's own abusive schooling, it is hardly surprising that he should have perpetuated that same cycle on his students, under the pretense of deliberately creating crises to promote change and growth in them:

The gopis [early, young female disciples of Krishnamurti, by analogy with the followers of Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita] would seek out private interviews with him, during which he mercilessly tore down their defenses and laid naked their faults, invariably ending with the girls crying their hearts out, but feeling it must be for the best (Vernon, 2001).

Even many years later, employing the same "skillful/cruel means" of awakening others,

Krishnamurti confronted Bohm in a way that others later described as “brutal” (Peat, 1997).

As we shall see, that is a common problem among the world’s spiritual paths for disciples who have endured their own guru-figures’ harsh discipline, and have then assumed license to treat others in the same lousy way as they themselves had been treated. The excuse there is, of course, always that such mistreatment is for the “spiritual benefit” of those others, even in contexts where that claim could not possibly be true.

Quarrels due to what Raja[gopal] remembers as Krishna’s frequent lying and undercutting of him, Krishna’s agreeing to proposals behind Raja’s back, and making promises that could not be kept, became so severe after several months in South America that once Krishna, who could only take so much criticism, slapped Raja. This was not the only time that would happen, but it was the first (Sloss, 2000).

Krishnamurti lacked ordinary human compassion and kindness; he was intolerant, even contemptuous, of those who could not rise to his own high plane (Vernon, 2001).

“Born with a heart two sizes too small,” etc.

At least one of Jiddu’s early “gopis,” however, saw through his clumsy, “cruel to be kind” attempts at spiritual discipline:

These supposedly privileged and beneficial sessions consisted of Krishna repeatedly pointing out well-known faults and picking on everything detrimental and sapping one’s confidence (Lutyens, 1972).

On at least one occasion, Krishnamurti was likewise inadvertently overheard making unprovoked, uncomplimentary remarks about others ... in his bedroom, with the married Rosalind (Sloss, 2000).

Neither Rajagopal nor Rosalind were ever devotees of Krishnamurti. Nor was David Bohm, whose own response to Krishnamurti’s (unsolicited) harsh public discipline—in a context where they were supposed to be in a dialog, not a guru-disciple relationship, by Jiddu’s own explicit rejection of the latter—was beyond tragic:

[T]he physicist was thrown into despair. Unable to sleep, obsessed with thoughts, he constantly paced the room to the point where he thought of suicide. At one point he believed that he could feel the neurotransmitters firing in his brain.... His despair soon reached the point where he was placed on antidepressants....

He once wrote to [Fritz Wilhelm] that he thought that his chest pains were a result of K's [i.e., Krishnamurti's] misbehaving towards him. "This problem with K is literally crushing me" (Peat, 1997).

* * *

Krishnamurti continued to lecture and discipline until his passing in 1986. In those activities, he gradually mutated his teaching style from that of a savior pronouncing cosmic truths to that of a personal counselor, focusing the content of those lectures on the split in consciousness between subject and object:

When man becomes aware of the movement of his own consciousness he will see the division between the thinker and the thought, the observer and the observed, the experiencer and the experience. He will discover that this division is an illusion. Then only is there pure observation which is insight without any shadow of the past. This timeless insight brings about a deep radical change in the mind (Krishnamurti, in [Lutyens, 1983]).

Through that personal realization, Krishnamurti claimed (completely untenably) to be unconditioned by his own upbringing and, indeed, to have (conveniently) "forgotten" most of his past. Nevertheless, his own teachings have much in common with those of both the Buddha and the Upanishads. Not coincidentally, Jiddu had been intensively schooled in both of those philosophies during his early years at Adyar (Sloss, 2000).

In line with his stultifying ideas on the nature of thought and knowledge, Krishnamurti further gave no instruction in structural/content techniques of meditation. Instead, he taught and practiced the meditative exercise as "a movement without any motive, without words and the activity of thought."

[R]epeating mantras and following gurus were, he said, particularly stupid ways of wasting time (Peat, 1997).

And the Krinsh, with his krinsh-feet quite warm in Ojai,
Said, “Be independent, meditate my way!
Be free without gurus!
Be free without mantras!
Be free without beliefs, intentions or tantras!”

Jiddu himself, however, was a guru in everything but name. The authoritarian pronouncements, intolerance for disagreement, and grandiosity could have come from any of the other “enlightened” individuals with whom we shall soon become too familiar. Though Krishnamurti himself was “allergic” to the guru-disciple relationship, “if it looks like a guru, talks like a guru and acts like a guru....”

After so many years surrounded by an inner circle, like a monarch attended by his courtiers who adored him and believed he could do no wrong, he had grown unused to being contradicted (Vernon, 2001).

[E]ven as he was insisting on the vital importance of individual discovery, the transcripts of his conversations with pupils [at his schools] reveal a man who mercilessly bullied his interlocutors into accepting his point of view (Washington, 1995).

Krishnamurti isolated himself from criticism and feedback, “just like everybody he was criticizing,” [Joel] Kramer [co-author of *The Guru Papers*] said, and had to have “the last word on everything” (Horgan, 1999).

Even as he lay on his deathbed, wasting away from pancreatic cancer, Krishnamurti stated firmly that “while he was alive he was still ‘the World Teacher’” (Vernon, 2001). (That terminal illness occurred in spite of his claimed possession of laying-on-of-hands healing abilities, which proved equally ineffectual in his own prior attempts at healing Bohm of his heart ailments.) Indeed, so enamored was the Krinsh of his own teaching position in the world that he recorded the following statement a mere ten days before his passing:

I don’t think people realize what tremendous energy and intelligence went through this body.... You won’t find another body like this, or that supreme intelligence operating in a

body for many hundred years. You won't see it again (in Lutyens, 1988).

Krishnamurti is supposed to have said that he is even greater than Buddha or the Christ (in Sloss, 2000).

And what happened then...?

Well ... in Adyar they say

That the World Teacher's head

Grew three sizes that day!

Of course, Krishnamurti's dissolution of the Order of the Star is often naïvely taken as indicating a profound humility on his part. However, as we shall implicitly see with every one of the "sages" to follow, it is only through extensive editing, in the selective presentation of the "enlightened" man's speech and actions, that any of them begin to look so humble and holy.

As to what Jiddu's own legacy may be, beyond his voluminous and arid written and recorded teachings, he essentially answered that question himself:

Shortly before his death the Indian teacher had declared that no one had ever truly understood his teaching; no one besides himself had experienced transformation (Peat, 1997).

That, too, is a recurring problem with the "great guru-figures" of this world—in generally failing to create even one disciple "as great as" themselves, in spite of their "skillful" discipline. More pointedly, any lesser, non-World teacher who could openly admit that *not even one* of his students had ever "truly understood his teaching" might have begun to question his own abilities in that regard. *This* World Teacher, however, evidently was not "conditioned" by any such need for self-evaluation.

Krishnamurti exhibited a lifelong penchant for fine, tailored clothing. One can further easily see clear vestiges, in his psychology, of the Indian caste system under which he had grown up (Vernon, 2001). Indeed, that background influenced him even to the point of his insisting that used books from others be wiped before his reading of them. In planning for his own death, he had further actually left instructions for the needed crematory oven to be thoroughly cleaned before his own use of it, and for that cleanliness to be verified by one of his followers. Evidently, this was to

ensure that no one else's "impure" ashes would commingle with his own holy, *brahmin*-caste remains.

We should all be so "unconditioned" by our own "forgotten" pasts, no?

[W]hen I interrogated Krishnamurti himself about the whole World Mother affair [i.e., the Theosophical Society's short-lived programme for global spiritual upliftment under a chosen woman after the "World Teacher" plans for Krishnamurti had fallen through], he blurted out, "Oh, that was all cooked u—" before he caught himself in the realization that he was admitting to a recollection of events in his early life which he later came to deny he possessed (Sloss, 2000).

[Emily Lutyens] said she knew Krishna was a congenital liar but that she would nevertheless always adore him....

My mother asked him once why he lied and he replied with astonishing frankness, "Because of fear" (Sloss, 2000).

Krinsh was outraged. His voice changed completely from a formal indifference to heated anger. It became almost shrill.

"I have no ego!" he said. "Who do you think you are, to talk to me like this?" (Sloss, 2000).

One day, history will reveal everything; but the division in Krishnamurti himself will cast a very dark shadow on all he has said or written. Because the first thing the readers will say, is: "If he cannot live it, who can?" (in Sloss, 2000).

Then the Krinsh slowly took off his World Teacher hat "If my teaching," he thought, "falls down too often flat.... Maybe teaching ... perhaps ... is not what I'm good at."

CHAPTER VI

ZEN IN THE ART OF SEX AND VIOLENCE

The Zen tradition has a history of famous drunken poets and masters.... Public encouragement for drinking in several communities where the teacher was alcoholic has led many students to follow suit, and certain Buddhist and Hindu communities have needed to start AA groups to begin to deal with their addiction problems....

Students who enter spiritual communities do not imagine they will encounter these kinds of difficulties (Kornfield, 1993).

[I]t became known that Maezumi [roshi/guru of the Zen Center in Los Angeles] had had a number of affairs with female students and had also entered a dry-out clinic for alcoholics (Rawlinson, 1997).

In 1975 and 1979, as well as later in 1982, the Zen Studies Society had been rocked by rumors of Eido Roshi's alleged sexual liaisons with female students....

Nor were the allegations limited to sexual misconduct. They spread to financial mismanagement and incorrect behavior (Tworkov, 1994).

ZEN BUDDHISM HAS BEEN WIDELY POPULARIZED in the West through the writings of individuals such as Alan Watts and D. T. Suzuki, not to mention Philip Kapleau's *The Three Pillars of Zen* and Eugen Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery*. As means toward enlightenment, it predominantly utilizes *zazen* meditation—sitting and counting/watching one's breath—and koans such as “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” Its Rinzai sect in particular further employs behaviors intended to shock disciples out of their normal state into enlightened awareness, and to aid in the “death of the ego” of the student—for which they also utilize “the stick”:

Zen teachers have an excellent method of dealing with students who start comparing themselves to Buddha or God [after their early enlightenment experiences, says Ken Wilber]. “They take the stick and beat the crap out of you. And after five or ten years of that, you finally get over yourself” (Horgan, 2003a).

That, however, is simply a ludicrously romanticized version of physical abuse meted out in the name of spirituality. In reality, such “crap-beating” behavior only shows the tempers and tendencies toward violence of individuals who are naïvely viewed by their followers as being spiritually enlightened.

Richard Rumbold, an English Zen enthusiast, who spent about five months at the Shokokuji, a monastery in Kyoto, describes some savage beatings-up administered by the head monk and his assistant for trifling disciplinary offences (Koestler, 1960).

Such brutal discipline could, further, easily get completely out of hand. Indeed, as a true story told to Janwillem van de Wetering (1999) during his long-term stay at a Japanese Zen monastery in Kyoto in the early 1970s goes:

In Tokyo there are some Zen monasteries as well. In one of these monasteries ... there was a Zen monk who happened to be very conceited. He refused to listen to whatever the master was trying to tell him and used the early morning interviews with the master to air all his pet theories. The masters have a special stick for this type of pupil. Our master has one, too, you will have seen it, a short thick stick. One morn-

ing the master hit the monk so hard that the monk didn't get up any more. He couldn't, because he was dead....

The head monk reported the incident to the police, but the master was never charged. Even the police know that there is an extraordinary relationship between master and pupil, a relationship outside the law.

Likewise, at a Buddhist repentance ceremony,

two young monks nodded off. After the ceremony, Dokujiki followed them back to the *sodo*, the monks' hall. Screaming in rage, Dokujiki grabbed the *kyosaku* [stick] and went after the young monks.... Dokujiki repeatedly pounded the two terrified fledglings with the thick winter stick.... Since Dokujiki was in a position of authority, nobody said a word to him about his transgressions....

"Some people would tell you that this is a tough form of Buddhist compassion," said Norman, "but it has nothing to do with Buddhism or compassion. It's a perversity that should be rejected....

"Even the stick should be dropped. The stick and this stupid macho attitude" (Chadwick, 1994).

Indeed, as far as "stupid macho attitudes" go, it would be difficult to top the celebration of Zen masters "beating the crap out of" their disciples. Yet ironically, Wilber himself, quoted earlier in exactly that regard, endorsed Chadwick's above text, enthusiastically blurbing, "I love this book!"

As Robert Buswell (1992) further tells it, such violence is actually not at all foreign to Zen, even outside of the purportedly valid discipline of its followers. For, during the fight between celibates and householders for control of Buddhist monasteries in Korea in the 1950s, after the end of the Korean War, the celibate monks

sometimes resorted to physical force to remove the married monks from the monasteries; indeed, older *bhiksus* [celibate monks] ... told many stories of celibates ordaining young thugs off the streets to bring muscle to their movement....

According to the main news organ of the celibates ... the married monks submitted false evidence in favor of their claims and illegally invaded temples that *bhiksus* had occupied, trying to retake them.

Such behavior would surely not have surprised Zen priest and scholar D. T. Suzuki, nor was it inconsistent with the attitudes of “enlightened” Zen masters in general:

With his oft-pictured gentle and sagacious appearance of later years, Suzuki is revered among many in the West as a true man of Zen. Yet he wrote that “religion should, first of all, seek to preserve the existence of the state,” followed by the assertion that the Chinese were “unruly heathens” whom Japan should punish “in the name of the religion.” Zen master Harada Sogaku, highly praised in the English writings of Philip Kapleau, Maezumi Taizan, and others, was also quoted by Hakugen [a Rinzai Zen priest and scholar teaching at Hanazono University in Kyoto]. In 1939 he wrote: “[If ordered to] march: tramp, tramp, or shoot: bang, bang. This is the manifestation of the highest Wisdom [of Enlightenment]. The unity of Zen and war of which I speak extends to the farthest reaches of the holy war [now under way]” (Victoria, 1997).

Daizen Victoria, quoted immediately above, is himself no unsympathetic outsider, but is rather a practicing Soto Zen Buddhist priest.

As Suzuki’s own “fully enlightened Zen master,” Soen/Soyen/So-on—who had earlier attended the 1893 Parliament of Religions (Fields, 1992)—put it:

[A]s a means of bringing into harmony those things which are incompatible, killing and war are necessary (in Victoria, 1997).

The Rinzai Zen master Nantembo (1839 – 1925) would certainly have agreed:

There is no bodhisattva practice superior to the compassionate taking of life (in [Victoria, 2003](#)).

Likewise for the sagely Omori Sogen, “lauded as the ‘greatest Zen master of modern times,’ whose very life is ‘worthy to be considered a masterpiece of Zen art’”:

Instead of a master concerned with the “life-giving sword” ... of Zen, we encounter someone who from the 1920s took an active part in the ultra-right’s agenda to eliminate parlia-

