

DARKNESS AND LIGHT

*Even as the Sun, the eternal, shines forever,
From His light grows the worlds.
So the lighted Soul reflects that mighty One
Whose light shall create and renew the lives of men.*

*If I become as a lamp,
Those in search of light will seek me out;
I need do no more than shine
For the light will beckon them from far places.*

*If I become as a torch made from rotten reeds,
Smoking and smoldering into the worlds' darkness,
Who shall wish to carry me for light
And to what end shall I suffer the burning of the flame.*

*The impure reed feels the agony of burning;
The pure wick bears the perfect flame painlessly.
The fire must be lit,
So choose, immortal Soul, how you shall burn.*

Croissant/Dees

The desires of the child-self clamor continuously, confining the greater-Self to the smallness of the child. Imagine quieting the child, becoming free of the chains that bind you and me to our littleness. As the confinement fades, the state is blissful, wakeful; the state is full of compassion.

from an Indian Sage

In the early 80's, the University of Oriental Studies in Los Angeles invited the Dalai Lama¹ to come and speak. I knew very little about the man at the time, but my friends and I decided it would be interesting to hear what he had to say.

The freeway was unusually difficult that day and we arrived late. I was tense from the drive and a bit apprehensive about getting a place to sit. We were lucky enough to find seats up high in one of the side balconies.

When he arrived on stage, the Dalai Lama stood behind a podium. Ten or twelve Tibetan monks sat in chairs on the stage to the right and left of him. He began to speak in fairly good English. As he talked, it became evident that his sense of humor was warm and pleasant. He said things that were thoughtful and kindly but not unduly moving. Still, he wasn't halfway through his presentation when I started to feel, well . . . different.

Even if I had known more about who the Dalai Lama was, I would *never* have expected the tone of my thoughts to have altered as radically as they did as I sat there watching him in that auditorium. The pettiness of my habitual nature, the self-imposed pressures of the day, the psychological tensions that go along with living, they all receded. It was just as though the lesser side of my *child-self* simply went to sleep, leaving me in this extraordinary, freed state.

. . . And it had absolutely nothing to do with what the Dalai Lama was actually saying. His message was clear but not novel; his presentation was OK but not stellar. What made him different was his presence. It was as though he bathed the audience in a meditation of peace, amplified by the collective mental presence of his accompanying monks. It completely took me by surprise.

¹ The Dalai Lama is primarily the political leader of Tibet, although he is also very much a spiritual leader (the primary spiritual leader is the Tashi Lama). Both are believed to be reincarnating Lamas, or *tulkus*.

Historically, when a Dalai Lama dies, a search is immediately launched to find the new child into which that Lama has reincarnated and become. The search can last many years with the Tibetan people and monks looking for a baby with the correct birthmarks. Once found, the child is put through a series of tests. The protocol is rigorous. For instance, the hereditary toys of previous Dalai Lamas are mixed with numerous other toys, then presented to the child (this was shown in the movie *Kundun* about the life of the Dalai Lama). If the child picks out the hereditary toys, he is allowed to continue with the tests (for those of you who saw Eddie Murphy's film "The Golden Child," this tradition was alluded to in the opening scenes); if he fails, the search is resumed.

Tenzin Gyatso is the fourteenth Dalai Lama. When the Chinese invaded Tibet in the 50's, he escaped into India (the Tashi Lama was captured by the Chinese; God only knows where he was taken or what they did to him) and established a Tibetan *government in exile* based in Dharamsala in the north of India. He is a very benevolent man who loves so deeply that he stands whole heartedly against violence, even against violence that if carried out might free his homeland (his kindness, I'm sure, is a considerable source of irritation for the Chinese government). He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990.

During the three days that followed, the effect lasted uninterrupted. I viewed life with a kinder, calmer, more complete eye. I found it easy, even natural, to act with compassion in situations where I would normally have become defensive and/or aggressive. I found that time was enough; that I could do in peace what was needed even in circumstances in which I would normally have been rushed. I was able to perceive what was important in the sense that I could look into the heart of a situation and find the bit of wisdom that was there, even in situations where emotions were high. My mind was cleansed of the clutter of trivial expectations and desires, which is to say that I could see with clarity through and beyond the emotions and dullness of my small self. The *tone of myself* was simply different.

The more I say, the more I realize how inadequate words are to describe the immensity and depth of the experience. What I can say is that it was blissful and that it lasted in full bloom until the morning of the fourth day at which time it faded, leaving me back in my old self. I don't know who else reacted in that way, nor am I completely sure why it happened to me (if this view is correct, it could have been a karmic giftie simply designed to allow me to understand that other states of awareness exist). What I do know is that during that period I was profoundly different from my normal state of being, and that the experience could only be characterized as enlightening.

I have since heard the Dalai Lama speak alone (i.e., without attending monks) twice. Neither time did I experience the effect, which makes me wonder how much the other monks contributed to my response the first time around.

I am sure there are ways a skeptic might explain away my rather peculiar experience, but the East has its own ideas about how a highly evolved spiritual Being (or group of them, for that matter) might affect an average individual like you or me, should they choose to do so. That is what we are interested in here.

If reincarnation is a reality, it is possible that there are individuals who have made choices and efforts that have moved them ahead of the stream of humanity in a spiritual sense (the culmination of this evolution is believed to be the enlightenment of the Buddhas). There are obviously as many "levels" of Being as there are Beings--each Awareness *is* its own state (I have no idea where the Dalai Lama fits into this continuum, though I suspect he is "up there"). Beings who have essentially learned all there is to

learn from existence on this planet are called in the West, Masters^{2,3}. In the East, specifically in India, they are called Mahatmas.⁴

It is interesting to note that although the West has had many so-called gurus from the East arrive on its shores proclaiming themselves to be Masters, the last century has seen a landslide of information about such Beings coming not from Easterners but from Westerners.⁵ Most notable was H.P. Blavasky, a Russian born noblewoman who traveled extensively in India at the end of the nineteenth century (no small feat in itself) and who started an international philosophic organization called the Theosophic Society⁶.

Blavasky has since been regularly maligned by skeptics for being everything from a smoker (God forbid), to a "loose woman" (not likely), to a psychic fraud (likely if you look at things from a Western perspective; not as likely if you look at things from an Eastern perspective). In fact, a look at the evidence suggests that her main transgression was to annoy a majority of the Christian missionaries in India by reminding the Indian people that they had a religious tradition the heart of which was every bit as worth while as that of Christianity (the Indian people loved her for this revelation). She also attempted to show people that the mind could affect matter (she was purported to be able to materialize things--an ability, assuming that she really had it, that is sure to send modern skeptics for the Pepto Bismol) and she set forth for the Western world an erudite, deeply reasoned presentation of the doctrine of reincarnation (the Buddhist view we have been examining).

I mention her here because there is an excellent book out called H.P.B.: The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavasky, by Sylvia Cranston⁷, in which a convincing argument is made for the contention that Blavasky did, as was claimed of her,

² It is interesting that many Christians unknowingly allude to this tradition when they call Christ "the Master Jesus."

³ By the very nature of what it means to be a Master (i.e., a state of ego-less purity), those who *claim* to be so couldn't possibly be! It is interesting that the Dalai Lama makes no such claim, though *Tibetans* traditionally believe him to be completely enlightened.

⁴ The word *maha* means *great* and the word *atma* means *soul*, hence *Mahatma* means "great soul."

⁵ This is not to discount the affect such writings as the Bhagavad Gita had on earlier American thinkers like Emerson and Thoreau.

⁶ The Theosophical Society is dedicated to the study of the great spiritual traditions of humanity. There are now two or three major Societies, each emphasizing a different aspect of Theosophic thought. The chapter linked to Adyar (in Madras, India) and Wheaton, Illinois publishes books on philosophy and spiritual research under the "Quest Books" imprint.

⁷ Sylvia Cranston has written a number of books on reincarnation including the anthology, Reincarnation, the Phoenix Fire Mystery, which she wrote in collaboration with Joseph Head.

have contact with some of the Masters believed to live around the border region between India and Tibet. My suspicion is that some pedantic academics are not going to be pleased with the possibility that she could have been anything but a crackpot (I was once roundly criticized by an editor at one of the university publishing houses for even *mentioning* Blavasky in a piece I was writing). But no matter what academicians say, the fact remains that a considerable amount of writing about the Masters--some of it responsible and thoughtful, some of it not--has come into the western world as a consequence of the impetus she provided in her own, voluminous work.

If that body of work is accurate, the Masters are the Guardians of humanity, but not in the sense one might expect. Their meditations set the *tone of thought* around the positive side of this evolution, reinforcing the thoughtforms of compassionate action, lovingness, selflessness, and spiritual growth (remember, the East believes that *thought* is a kind of energy that flows freely within the inner worlds and has the ability to palpably affect minds). As a group, they form a natural brotherhood of effort.⁸

What is important here is that the East believes that these Beings exist, in bodies, right now, on this planet.⁹

With all this in mind, an interesting question arises. If the Masters represent the level of Awareness toward which human evolution is moving, are we all assured of reaching that state?

The answer is "yes" and "no."

From the Eastern perspective we are examining, spiritual evolution is pictured as a spiraling process. Beings start in a pure state "above," descend into the experience of matter, then spiral up, out and beyond in a spiritual sense. In this way, Consciousness is given the opportunity to grow and become more through a series of incarnations, even though there may be times within the evolution when it appears as if Consciousness is failing--is going downward.

⁸ In early writing, these Beings were collectively referred to as *The White Brotherhood* (the reference to "white" is meant to symbolize the idea of purity--it has nothing to do with race). That name has long since been blasphemed by many modern New Age groups trying to legitimize their claims to spirituality through claims of contact with these Beings.

⁹ A common New Age belief is that the Masters must be "on the other side" (i.e., that they must be disincarnate spirits who communicate to humanity through mediums and channels). If the Eastern view we have been examining is correct, there are Beings at this high level of evolution both in the inner worlds and in incarnation. In addition, it is sure that Masters who work in the inner worlds do not play overshadower to channeling psychics. That simply isn't the kind of thing a responsible spiritual Teacher would do.

Right now, if this view is correct, humanity is at the lowest point in this evolution. The East calls this *the kaliyuga*--the age of iron (it is believed to be an "age" in the sense that it could take tens-of-thousands of years to complete). This is the time when humanity experiences its deepest immersion in matter; when the energies and pressures of life are the heaviest; when a fair percentage of the Beings in bodies are individuals who have made particularly bad choices over many lifetimes, and who are now being given one last chance to move in ways that are better.

If a relatively normal individual has accreted around itself through many lifetimes of poor choice so much negativity that it will not be able to transit into the spiritually subtle experiences awaiting those who will move on the upward side of the spiral, that Being will not be allowed to continue in the present cycle of development. Going into a sleep state, it will remain actionless until another evolution similar to this one begins anew. This is not a punishment, although it is a failure. The Being is not damned; it is simply not able to proceed and must lag behind for a time (a very long time) until the universe can provide it with another appropriate opportunity to move onward.

A self that has been able to curb its child to at least some degree will be allowed to continue as the evolutionary path swings upward. It and its developed child-self will finish this evolution, coming out much more experienced and capable in the ways of existence-in-matter than was the case in the beginning. What is important here is that although there may be Beings in incarnation who are clearly moving upon "the right-hand path" (i.e., along the upward way), there are many souls who are on the edge. The Kaliyuga is the period of time when karma and the *High Mind within* presents these child-selves with their last chances to change in this cycle.

There is another side to all this.

It is believed in the East that when an individual has proceeded to a point of spiritual development where he or she can benefit from contact with a more highly evolved Teacher, the individual will come in contact with one of the Masters. At that time, if it is karmically correct, the individual will have the opportunity to become a student of one these Teachers. In Sanskrit, an accepted student is called a *chela*.¹⁰

¹⁰ The tradition of a student going in search of his or her teacher, a guru, is closely related to the belief that Masters exist. Although the idea originated in the East, it is particularly prevalent today in the West. People are seeking. Many have concluded that there is more to life than meets the eye. They want

On one level, the life of a chela is wonderful:

--The individual has the honor and privilege of having contact with one or even a number of these enlightened humans.

--There is joy in following a spiritual path, in moving in ways that are constructive and positive and Light-bringing.

--There is a satisfaction in working to pull free of the patterns that prompt anger and jealousy and craving in the self.

--There is a very deep gratitude engendered toward life as the self experiences tiny enlightenment after tiny enlightenment on its path of unfolding.

On the other hand, chelthood is not the romantic happening many picture it to be:

--The inner link between a chela and his or her Master means the Teacher is intimately connected to the student. How would you like to know that a highly evolved Being is feeling what you are feeling: knows all your little foibles, all your secret desires, all your little pettinesses.¹¹

--A chela is said to live *in* the world but not be *of* the world. That means he or she no longer has the luxury of mindlessly going along with the crowd; mindlessly pandering to the wants and desires of the self; mindlessly allowing the child to use negativity to make its way in the world.

--It is not unusual for groups of chelas to work together, but there are times when a chela must work in isolation. Self-created disciplines are the norm; following those disciplines within the confines of the *self alone* is an extreme discipline unto itself.

answers, and that means looking for someone who has insight. What they don't realize is that when the time is appropriate--when they have made their lives *ready through their actions*--the teacher will come to them.

Put another way, living the life of a chela means living the life of a chela . . . whether one is in direct contact with the Masters or not. There is no difference between the two situations; if you are going to live the life, live the life.

¹¹ Remember, a Master is a Being that has evolved to such an extent that there is no longer any necessity for that Being to deal with the barriers that keep you and me feeling separate. As such, an energy link between the heart chakras of a chela and his or her Master can bring the Teacher into a much more intimate contact with the inner thoughts and efforts of the chela than would otherwise be. The chela isn't so aware of this connection as he or she acts in daily life, but it is nevertheless believed to be there connecting the Teacher to the student.

--A chela's sensitivity and depth-of-insight is usually heightened--a definite double-edged sword. Not only does one see other people more clearly, one sees one's own self more clearly (often a very spooky proposition).

In other words, the chela has essentially announced to the Law (karma) that he or she wants to move more quickly in a spiritual sense. That is not a trivial matter. If the intention is accepted, within a very short time every imaginable sort of hidden psychological flaw and inconsistency within the self burbles up out of the subconscious and presents itself to the aspirant (negativity cannot be stripped away if its presence is not evident to the person). Psychological pressures mount; situational pressures mount; failure to act in spiritually responsible ways is met with karmic repercussions that are far more severe than would be the case for a "normal" person. In short, the chela life is, from a personal perspective, harsh . . . Remember the Greater Mysteries? The kinds of people who attended those were undoubtedly chela types.

Still, it is said, the chela life is the most rewarding life one can lead.

Most people assume that all chelas are cheerful, pleasant individuals, and there is a good chance that that be true. What shouldn't be forgotten, though, is that one can never be certain what is going on in another's life. Theosophists believed Blavasky was a chela, hence her connection with the Masters.¹² Although chelas do not always have powers and sensitivities beyond the norm, Blavasky was purported to have been quite sensitive inwardly. Imagine what it would be like to be so sensitive that you could feel the thoughts of those who intensely disliked you. If she had that sensitivity, the animosity and anger that was directed at her by the Christian missionaries (not to mention every skeptic in the world) must have been an enormous mental burden. It would have taken a tremendously powerful Being to remain emotionally stable under such conditions.¹³

¹² In fact, some believe that she was not only a chela but a chela with the specific task of bringing a rational view of reincarnation to the West.

¹³ When I hear about cynical skeptics testing psychics, I wonder what they think they are doing. Self-proclaimed psychics, assuming they aren't frauds, are almost always at least partially uncontrolled (chelas, assuming this view is correct, have control but aren't interested in attracting attention to themselves and, more to the point, have bigger and better things to be doing than to play psychological tag with an assembly of ego-bound skeptics).

In short, higher chelas do have control over and insights into themselves in ways that could be termed extraordinary. They are Beings who are constantly making their efforts on behalf of the whole of life (the first vow of chelahood is said to be *to work for the whole of life without thought of recompense*). Although it is not their immediate aim, in doing so they moved toward become what a human should be. And because their work has nothing to do with ego satisfaction, you could be standing right next to one some day and never know it.¹⁴

Still, chelas are not perfected Beings, and that puts them in a certain amount of danger.

There is another twist to all of this that is important to understand.

If, as the East believes, it is possible for a Being to make choices that will move it ahead of the spiritual stream of humanity, it must also be possible for a child-self to build, through certain disciplines, enormous mental abilities while making *conscious choices* that lead it along the "left hand path"--toward negativity and the *stunting* of spiritual growth. Because these individuals have focused their minds in ways that have allowed them to temporarily put karma off (as opposed to the Beings we learned about earlier who rather randomly chose poorly and will enter the sleep state until a new cycle can pick them up again), they exist to become darkness incarnate (i.e., devoid of Light). Their efforts are for the accumulation of power, for the satisfaction of the child's wants, for control of all around them. Being totally in-turned on their own self, they have become soulless in the sense that they have severed all connection with their parent self, the Higher Mind.

We are talking about Beings who are profoundly angry at life. Their intention is usually to bring as many other humans down with them as possible. What is worse, they

So who do they test? Little Suzy down the street who, maybe, has a little ability to sense beyond the norm but who is so aurically shaky that she falls apart as soon as a focused, skeptical mind inveighs against her.

It is no wonder skeptics haven't been able to find anyone who can perform psychic feats to their satisfaction (though given their preconceived ideas about the possibility, it is doubtful that they would believe even if someone *could* perform on cue--see Appendix III for such an example). The very nature of a skeptic's thoughts on the subject are almost certain to psychically jam just about anybody willing to try.

¹⁴ There is a nice story from India about a beggar who sat against a wall on a small street in Benares. When people would pass by, whether they gave him a few rupees or not, they would find that within fifty yards of passing him they would feel better than they had. It was a kind of lightening of their load. The beggar, according to the story, was a chela. His self-appointed task in his life was to learn to radiate lovingness, which is exactly what he did.

often have the power to do so in ways one might not expect. Specifically, they *could* be (though certainly are not always) failed chelas.

This startling possibility doesn't seem to make sense until it is examined more closely.

At the early stages of chelaship, powers begin to open even as psychological pressures begin to mount on the child-self and its ego structure. The inner struggles that occur between the higher side of the child-self and the living, negative habit patterns that the self has developed over many lifetimes can be fierce (these are usually motivational patterns that must be killed out and that, being animate, literally fight for their lives--you know what this kind of in-fighting is like if you have ever tried to stop a nasty habit like smoking or a benign one like eating sweets).

With this effort, it is likely that there will be temporary failures. This is particularly dangerous for the aspirant. Essentially in a state of inner war, the lesser side of the *child-self* of a chela will not be completely aligned with the High Mind. In that state, it is possible that failure could so infuriate the *ego self* that the *higher side* of the child might lose control to the *lesser side*. If that were to happen, the self could temporarily take up the path of negativity.¹⁵ In most cases the chela's attention-to-motive helps him or her get a hold of the self and back on track, but anger is a powerful thoughtform and nothing is assured. If there are areas of motivation that haven't yet been cleansed, those chinks in the moral armor of the Being could lead to the holding of this anger and maybe even to a budding desire for the self to *get back* at life for the failure.¹⁶

If the self is unable to pull out of the negativity, we could end up with a very angry, very powerful individual on our hands. And if that individual were to continue with its negativity, digging a karmic hole for itself that becomes deeper and deeper, it is possible the Being could get to a place where there appeared to be no way back to the

¹⁵ It is not unusual for humans, you and me included, to become temporarily insane. Consider: You have just walked up to a counter at a department store and the clerk, who is obviously agitated, is rude to you. Do you observe that the person has a problem and react to their incivility in a kindly way--in a way that will lighten their emotional load--or do you take offense and blast them? From a perspective of *spiritual sanity*, it makes no sense to provoke the clerk into more anger, more unbalance, more misery than he or she is already experiencing. Yet that is exactly what most of us would do when we are confronted with an "unpleasant person." This is not an act of sanity, at least not in a spiritual sense.

¹⁶ It is remarkable how people blame failure on anything but themselves. The last time you hit your thumb with a hammer, did you say, "Damn it!" ("it" meaning the hammer) or "Damn me!" (placing the blame squarely where it belongs)?

Light. When that happens, when the Being sees no reward in even trying to change for the better, it becomes what the East calls a *Brother of the Shadow*--a *Dark Brother*.

Though this is not the only way such an individual might come about, most traditions have lore about these dark souls: There is a Tibetan Buddhist sect, the Red-hats, who worship death. Within that tradition are men called *dugpas* whose ritual practices are steeped in animistic earth magic that pre-dates Buddhism. Some *dugpas* are said to be very dark in spirit and to have enormous powers. Having trained themselves through meditation, they are believed to have the ability to affect and control the minds of the unwary.¹⁷

Dark ones can also be found amongst the shamans of the American Indians;¹⁸ the witch doctors of Africa; the magicians of middle east; the sorcerers of Europe. All over the world there are tales of Beings who have had powers and who are not benevolent in their use of them.

This Eastern view believes that such dark Beings do exist, in bodies, right now, on this planet. What is more, they are believed to be a natural consequence of the opportunities and pitfalls that face all Beings who attempt to progress through repeated incarnation. The only way a Being can grow into a working knowledge of free will and freedom of choice is if it has the possibility of choosing to be bad. It should not be surprising to find that some have taken that path.

As things stand now, nothing would make the Dark Brothers happier than to have as many Beings fail in their efforts during the kaliyuga as possible. Misery loves company, and if there is one state that is miserable it is that of the soulless.¹⁹ Since the accumulation of power for the sake of the self is the driving motivation behind the dark ones, it is believed that they are constantly projecting thoughtforms designed to affect the

¹⁷ Remember the little fakir who focused thought to make the English newspaper man believe he was seeing flames? That is child's play in comparison to what *dugpas* are purported to be able to do.

¹⁸ Medicine men (shamans) within the American Indian tradition were generally benevolent, but some were not. Consider the shamanistic practice of killing an animal to capture its life-energy. Attempting to force nature into giving up her secrets and energies is never the way of an enlightened Being (to an enlightened Being, nature will give its secrets *freely*). *Killing* to force nature into giving up energies is a doubly dark thing to do.

¹⁹ That is, those who have severed the link between the High Mind and the lesser self.

minds of the unsuspecting. They do this through today's music²⁰, through the reinforcement of the desire for revenge; through irrational anger; through drugs. The more chaos, the better; the more anger and frustration, the better; the more they can pull you and me off the path, the better. Their champions are the Adolf Hitlers, the Pol Pots, the Stalins, not to mention the myriad of lesser folks (you and me) who, to one degree or another, mindlessly fortify the dark meditations with unpleasantness where there need be none, with selfishness, with the exercise of petty angers, etc.

Against this stands the White Brotherhood. These guardians of humanity are constantly projecting the thought forms of compassion, reconciliation, kindness--of reason beyond that of the small self. The tone of their quality is found in the actions of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, the Dalai Lama, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and in the myriad small acts of benevolence that lesser folks (you and me) selflessly animate daily--being kind when you don't have to be; being helpful when others are in need; choosing to be understanding when someone hasn't been particularly nice to you (versus reflecting their discourtesy and anger back at them).

And which is more powerful, the White or Dark Brotherhood? Ultimately, Light will reign. Evolution never ceases, even when it appears stalled. But duality has its usefulness; it is the generator of choice. At this time, the powers of Light and Darkness are almost exactly even; the duality is almost perfectly balanced. Why? Because this is the kaliyuga; there is need for a clear delineation between goodness and darkness. It is a time of choice.²¹

So what does this all come down to? As far as this view is concerned, there is quite literally a battle going on right now between the powers of Light and the powers of Darkness . . . and the stakes, quite literally, are the souls of humanity.

²⁰ Although music can be quite harmonious, its effect on the emotional body makes it a primary entrance point into the aura. The sound patterns found in modern music are believed to be degenerating to the aura and generally debilitating both psychologically and on more subtle levels. Music that is tinged dark is believed to have the power to magnify depression, over stimulate the body's sexual drive (not to mention other appetites), and reinforce thoughtforms of violence, anger, hatred, sexual depravity, etc. In short, projecting dark thought through the minds of people involved in the making of modern music--especially those who are on drugs--is believed to be a powerful tool in the hands of the dark side.

²¹ In the long run, the Dark ones will lose, *must* lose under the Karmic Law. Whether they like it or not, they are bound by karma. In fact, in a way they are servants of the karmic Law--agents who give the opportunity of choice to others. They know this down deep; it is part of what makes them so angry.