

REID H. GARDNER

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Dear Dr. Merrell-Wolff,

It may be that I am taking an undue liberty by writing you this kind of letter. I hope not. What I want is permission to call on you sometime soon. And the reason I wish to see you is simply that I have read through your book, "Pathways Through to Space", for the second time and now realize that if it is genuine (and my whole being is convinced that it is genuine) then no Bodhisattva or Avatar like yourself has been known in the history of the West. Such an advent must be a wondrous rarity. But you will know if this is overstatement.

I am desirous to enter the presence of a Liberated Man because I want Liberation myself. That is the only reason.

My present search got underway in the winter of 1943, when I was in the army; and no other person converted me. While reading a scripture I realized quite suddenly that my ultimate end was indeed Union with God. Soon after this, I read the Surangama Sutra for the first time, though with more spiritual relish than insight. Much later, during the battle of Germany, I was again reading the Sutra while stationed on a Rhön mountain, and one night I realized that this whole world could only be hallucination, a theatrical Lila, and (despite the horror) the

cosmos was almost a theodicy, because in truth all "souls" had ascended eternally into Nirvana already. The idea brought me a great relief, and opened my mind to subsequent, less primitive realizations.

In a camp near Rheims during 1945, I read Shankara for the first time (part of his Atmabodha) and also Asvaghosha, both of whom I delightedly enthroned beside the Mahayana Buddha, the most profound Enlightener I knew of. When the atomic bomb occurred I was horrified and turned into a pacifist overnight, vowing to do nothing in the future but destroy my selfhood and "attain Transcendence". (Except for inevitable sidetracks since then, I've had only one real ambition--to have Liberation and help others to have the same) In a forest in the suburbs of Rheims I launched into more or less systematic periods of meditation, trying to put Patanjali's yoga into practice. With little success. Though the aftermath of such blind concentrations occasionally gave rise to ecstatic moments when the mind was moving freely in a slow rhythm. Formal meditation has occupied part of my time until now.

Last year the army discharged me. To return to the University of California at Berkeley simply didn't seem worthwhile. No one could major in Recognition at a university. The end of the kalpa seemed at hand, a frightful cataclysm. Then last summer in Los Angeles, I was interested in the so-called Vedanta taught by the Vedanta Society, and in the fall Swami Prabhavananda invited

me to come live in the ashram with him at Santa Barbara. After about two months in this atmosphere of dualistic Hinduism I voluntarily left, without being initiated by the Swami or accepting any personal instruction from him.

My only recent success in contemplation--or hope of true Dhyana--has come by following your own words, with which I feel complete accord. Each concept set forth by you seems not only effectively true and beautiful but almost familiar from the first reading: the perfect and immemorial Dharma unstained by any racial theology or cherished opinions.

Now by all this talk of mine, you can perceive that I really want more of you than one visit. That is true. Even though the Enlightened Ones who remain here below to enlighten the people are often grossly imposed upon by spiritual aspirants like myself, yet I hope that you will be my Guru. Such exalted Teachers as yourself are hopelessly few and far between; in America and Europe they are unheard of. But please do not allow me to intrude in any way. Whether you decide to see me or not, or whether you find that I have not ascended high enough to be a disciple of yours, is a matter for your judgment alone.

And what would I desire from you as a Guru? Your Presence above all. I am certain you will give me whatever is right. If you could permit me to see you not more than a few times each year, it would be enough. On the other hand, if you would let me come fortnightly or weekly or daily even, I would

be very happy. As a matter of fact, under those conditions, it would be easy for me to take up residence near San Fernando, for I have no profession or permanent occupation or finances and my only concern is with Liberation and right livelihood. And the possibility of serving you in any way. But above all, do not suffer my importunate eagerness if it is unworthy.

From occasional references in your book I infer that you have taught classes of some type, and so I would like to join any class you might be conducting. However, I am illiterate in mathematics and physics, though metaphysics and philosophy are not entirely beyond me.

I am now twenty-three years of age and disgustingly normal and sane (except for this spiritual preoccupation) but eager to frame my life around whatever advice you will give me.

Very truly yours,

*Reid Gardner*

San Fernando, Calif.,  
Feb. 9, 1947.

Dear Mr. Gardner:

Rarely do we find aspirants of your age who have had the insight which came to you on the Rhön mountain. It was indeed good to hear from you and we would be happy to see you when that may become convenient. There is a lot of philosophy in your insight - of the kind which is not often acceptable to the western mind, even among spiritually oriented students. Of the two Doors of the Mind given in Ashvaghosha's "Awakening of Faith" it is the Door leading to the differentiations of appearing and disappearing, of life and death which carries the primary reality value to the western mind. To such a one the spiritual problem naturally appears to be that of melioration. Yet, although such effort certainly has its place and is by no means to be despised, however, Realization, Liberation and Enlightenment in the higher sense mean the Awakening through the Higher Door to the Pure Essence. Then, from the perspective of that Higher Door the whole world of the lower door does appear as an "hallucination, a theatrical Lila" as you so aptly say. Yes, it is true that all "souls had ascended eternally into Nirvana already" or, rather, with more exactness, they never had descended and never could be other than eternally identical with Nirvana in their inmost nature. This is to say essentially what the Sixth Patriarch meant when he said the inmost nature of all creatures is Buddha. All this is true enough. But now a problem arises which must be faced, though it is far from easy. What is the use of the second door if it leads to such nightmarish hallucinations as we now experience in this world? And, How may we relate ourselves from the standpoint of the insight of Realization to the problems of the second door? Creatures dying by starvation and torture and baffled by all sorts of frustrations and disillusionments do not respond very readily to the statement that it is all just a bad dream and that all which is needed is to wake-up, true as that may be. The dream has a simply terrible force. The dreamer somehow must be met on the level of his dream until a more favorable condition is reached. Here we have problems which try the metal of even the greatest.

You speak of not returning to the University because you could not there major in Recognition and a frightful cataclysm seems to be impending. True enough. But here we have that which bears upon the function of the second door. This "dream-world" does have its use and the greatest use, as I see it, lies in its capacity to build the power of self-consciousness. In this, pain is a great teacher, though not the only teacher. The power of Self-consciousness between the realized Buddha and the innate Buddhahood of all creatures. One might advisedly by a student to the end though he were the last man in a dying world. The University might ~~be~~ or might not have what you most need, but I do not think that even an impending cataclysm is necessarily a sufficient reason for turning one's back upon it. It all depends upon the individual or circumstance

It is not surprising that your experiments with Patanjali's Yoga were not very successful. On the whole, Indian methods do not work too well with western man. It is the combination of the right man and the right method which gives results. The old Indians had the insight in highest degree and the Goal they envisaged is the Universal Goal, but method is relative. In the end, each of us finds his own Way, and any Way that works is right, in the relative sense. But there are general principles of method which apply to specific races and cultures. For us of the West this is a pioneering problem.

You suggest becoming a Chela. With respect to this I will quote the words of an Elder Brother in answer to a similar inquiry. "To accept any man as a Chela does not depend on my personal will. It can only be the result of one's personal merit and exertions in that direction. Force any one of the 'Masters' you may happen to choose; do good works in his name and for the love of mankind; be pure and resolute in the path of righteousness (as laid out in our rules); be honest and unselfish; forget your self but to remember the good of other people - and you will have forced that 'Master' to accept you." But remember that if you can face the hand of the Guru you win his respect and approval.

You seem to have some understanding of the office of the Bodhisattva and the Avatar. But perhaps you do not realize that such may be seen only with the inner Eye. The objective shell may be quite other than what one expects. Objective appearance is a Maya which as often veils and as reveals. Aspirants are often tested as to their discrimination. But he who is pure, earnest and determined will find that which he seeks. He who would attain the Great Jewel must be willing to offer all, even the renunciation of the Reward itself. Yet to be able to do this is to Win. For then self has died to be replaced by the ALL-SELF.

If you should choose to come to San Fernando, you may do so. But you should let us know before hand. We have a telephone, San Fernando 6833. I suggest that if you are in the vicinity you make a telephone call and arrange for an appointment.

May the blessing of the Light of the Dharma shine about you.

Yours very sincerely,

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Dear Reid:

At last I propose to consider on paper some features in your excellent discussions. In particular I shall devote attention to your discussion of self-analysis as this presents the very crucial difference between traditional Buddhism and the Vedanta of Shankara.

As I see it, the primary question is: Is there a Self which has a reality-value not inferior to that of the object of consciousness? The question thus stated does not raise the problem as to whether the Self is the ultimate \*Self-existence but only as to whether it has a relative being not inferior to the object of consciousness. From the standpoint I have had to take since the eighth of Sept. 1936 the Self is not such a Self-existence and in so far my position is congruent with Buddhism. But a vast number of statements in the Sutras indicate that Buddhism, at least in some of its exoteric forms, goes further than this and gives the Self either no reality-value or, at best, a reality value inferior to that of the object. One quotation from your quotation will illustrate this. "All things are void of an Atman". I assume that the word "Atman" is used as ~~synonym~~ an equivalent of the word "Self", though the intended meaning might be different. I have used the two words as identical in meaning in my writings and for the sake of the argument will assume that the Buddhist use is the same, admitting the possibility of error at this point. But returning to the quotation. The form of the statement implies at least a relative reality-value for "things" which is denied to the "Self". "Things" at least have an existential value sufficient to justify a positive statement concerning them. Indeed, if the word is used rigorously, it sounds like a predication of existence for that which is outside consciousness in every sense, as otherwise the word "objects" would have to be used. That would be sheer materialism. But it may be only verbal inaccuracy so I shall not make a point of this.

In so far as traditional Buddhism gives to the Self a relative reality-value inferior to that of the object my own standpoint must diverge from Buddhism, and this it must do eventhough it were proven that such was the actual teaching of Gautama. If He did so teach I would have to regard it as a defect in His insight and logic. This is not something I do readily because of my great respect for the Great Buddha. However, we cannot be certain of just what Buddha's real teaching was.

To clear the field, let us first define just what we shall mean by the "Self". I understand it as identical with the word "Atman", as noted above. Further, I understand it as identical with the terms "pure subject" and "subjective moment" of consciousness. Also, it is the referent of the pronoun "I" considered as neither personal nor capable of declination in the gramatical sense, i.e., only can be used correctly in the nominative case and never becoming a "me" or a "my". In addition, I suggest the "Self" as meaning the "Light of Consciousness" while the object would be the "shadow of Consciousness", i.e., that which is cast upon the Screen of the Void through the action of the Light. It may be also called the "Power of Awareness" in Consciousness, in which case "awareness" is not

to be understood as identical in meaning with the word "consciousness". "Consciousness" would be a more comprehensive term including along with the potential of awareness the content of awareness as well.

With the "Self" considered as defined above the assumptions you make preceding your analysis would be impossible. I believe that, given your assumptions, the rest of the argument follows logically enough. The conclusion was the inevitable consequence of the assumptions. I do not challenge the logic but the correctness of the assumptions. The "Self" conceived as something which can be observed leads undoubtedly to the infinite regression as you have shown so clearly. But if the "Self" is the pure subject it can never be observed. Concrete subjective determinants of relative consciousness can be observed by introspection, but this is not pure subjectivity. It may even be possible to observe the integrating center of personal or individual consciousness for which the terms lower and higher ego are often used. It is a fundamental error to confuse the "Self" with either of these. They may well be viewed as functionally similar to glasses placed before the eyes. Vision passes through the glasses and is modified by them as by color and prism distortion. But the glasses are distinct from the essence of vision. Looking through the glasses and forgetting them we may fall into the error of predicating concerning vision that which is true of the glasses, but not of vision per se. By the appropriate means we can observe the glasses, but that is not observing the observer. We might, perhaps, say that vision possesses the glasses, but it would be wholly incorrect to say that the glasses possess vision. Similarly, I might correctly speak of my "ego" but it would never be correct to say my Self, when the latter term is understood as pure subjectivity.

So far the argument is purely verbal, a sort of dialectical clearing of the ground. Later we shall consider the really important question of whether we have something more than a verbal argument. But first let us define ourselves as to subject and object a little more clearly. Let us assume that ordinary or relative consciousness is a dualistic or subject-object consciousness. Second, let us assume that in any duality the component members are of opposite characters so that if the two members, say A and B, are added, they just neutralize each other. What one has the other does not have, et visa versa. In that case, the object never can be the subject in the pure sense, nor the subject an object. In a word, the subject could never be observed, for then it would be an object, contrary to primary assumption. But relative consciousness is subjective-objective, by primary assumption and I am aware of objects. Objects by themselves do not give immediately the subjective component, therefore, it follows (a) that the subject must be and (b) that it is unseen and unseeable. For otherwise consciousness would not be subjective objective.

If now we not only assume but recognize relative consciousness as subjective-objective then the reality of the subjective moment or Self is a necessary inference. I submit that this inference is more soundly grounded than most of the inferences which we must make in order to live. I would certainly maintain that its

derivation is more rigorous than any of the inferences of empiric science and, therefore, pragmatically justified. But definitely this is not direct realization of the Self. It is not immediate knowledge and the mystical transformation depends upon such immediacy.

If by "Self-knowledge" we mean knowledge of the Self as an object Self-knowledge is impossible. Is it possible that Buddhistic analysis went no further than this? You have made me wonder. Perhaps I have assumed more profundity on the part of the Buddhists than was justified. Could it be that here is a blind-spot in that whole tradition and that to understand them correctly they must be taken in a more superficial sense? On this question you have led me to a lot of serious thinking. Perhaps, I, too, will have to apply some iconoclasm to portions of the Buddhistic teaching. Negation can become a sort of idol in reverse.

Now, I know that Self-realization is possible, but this is not knowledge of an object. Perhaps we might call the process an inverse cognition. I shall have to describe what I mean by this. If one studies the process of cognition, either sensual or conceptual, with careful subtlety he will find something like a flow out toward the object. This flow may be likened to a light-ray. The flow can be observed, itself, in some measure and it can be more or less completely stopped. The object can be made to disappear and in its place may be found either a sense of darkness or of light. It may even induce an ecstatic state of more or less intensity. Now reverse the flow, which is a process of profound introversion, and you have Self-realization. It is a state of the Light centered in itself and not flowing to objects. It is like beginning a judgment starting with "I" and going no further. This is the isolation of the subjective-moment. The absolute dissolution of the object is not necessary, for one may achieve his realization by reflecting only part of the ray back. This avoids trance.

A step of the kind outlined in the last paragraph can produce results. Actually, such a step started the process which made "Pathways" possible. And that process did not result in a fixation in pure subjectivity but opened the way for the spontaneous outbreak of the state I have called "Consciousness-without-an-object-and, without-a-subject". This appears to be identical with what the Buddhists mean by "Essence of Mind".

Now, as to the character of the Self as revealed by Self-realization in so far as it may be interpreted in a conceptual judgment. Its character is Light, whereas "Consciousness-without-an-object" is neither light nor darkness. (It is reflected in the outer consciousness as a sort of twilight) There is no becoming nor ceasing in it. It neither suffers nor enjoys. It is the utterly impersonal and absolutely universal Witness. Realization results in detachment from one's own personality combined with the knowledge of being equally present in all creatures. It is absolutely monistic. There is no such thing as a plurality of Selves. In contrast, Consciousness-without-an-object is not many and not one.

Is the relation of the Subject to the Object horizontal or

vertical? It is possible that the final answer must be "Both". But my own realization gives the vertical relationship. By that I mean that the dynamic energy flows from the Subject to the Object, thereby giving the the former causal priority. Awareness projects the object of awareness. This makes the relationship hierarchical. However, I must leave open the question as to whether the step to That which is neither object nor subject can be taken directly from objectively oriented consciousness. The Buddhistic teaching seems to imply this possibility and I am impressed with the competency of the Buddhistic Sages. But, to be perfectly frank, their speech in this respect sounds like nonsense to me. I know immediately that the Path through the Subject is possible and I do not know that any other Path is possible, though I assure inferentially that such Paths exist.

There are certain implications of your destructive analysis which you may have not considered. If direct knowledge of the Self is to be denied because the Self cannot be made into an object for observation, then on this ground we must throw overboard both the notion of the Unconscious and of the Great Void or Shunyata. Both von Hartmann and Jung are explicit in affirming their notion of the Unconscious on inductive grounds. It cannot be realized directly simply for the reason that to realize it is to destroy its nature ~~and~~ unconscious. Second, Shunyata is definitely defined as not an object as well as not a subject. Therefore it cannot be known as an object of consciousness. If it can be realized (which it can) it must be by some other means of cognition, which reproduces the point I have made concerning the knowledge of the Self. So you see that if your iconoclasm is carried through consistently without exempting a personally preferred, you would have to deny Shunyata, Tao or Nohm along with everything else and wind up in absolute nihilism. It may be suggested that belief in an arbitrary personal god can be more fun than that.

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In one of your other letters in which you devoted considerable space in throwing overboard practically everything that could be imagined, with the possible exception of beefsteaks, you listed evolution. This leads to some very interesting considerations. Now I know that from the most ultimate point of view there is no relativity. All creatures from atoms to gods and all between have precisely the same meaning. It may be said that there is no difference between the pure clay in an ordinary brick and the clay in the finest production of ceramic art. Thus the Buddha-nature is precisely the same in all creatures and there is neither high nor low. It is a sort of absolute democracy. I know the truth of this in the absolute sense. But it does not therefore follow that evolution is irrelevant with respect to realization. I assume that as a practical matter we are not working to get the Absolute enlightened. I have never felt that there was any real need of being compassionate toward the poor dear Absolute, but if there were I would grant you that evolution is irrelevant. It must be granted that as an empiric fact Realization does make a difference for the consciousness of the relative being who knows Realization, however true it is that in the absolute sense, nothing has happened. Now, from the relative side (the only side relevant for Compassion) evolution may be important and even highly important. But assume it is not. Then one may conclude that he could devote himself to

the enlightenment of earth-worms with just as much hope of success and with results of no less significance as compared to effort oriented to the most evolved true Brahmin. In fact the crystals of granite rock might suggest a particularly rich field since there are so many of them. A number of interesting questions arise as, for instance: How would the Dharma manifest in the case of an enlightened cow? I imagine we would get some Suttras even less comprehensible than the Zen.

Now, seriously, if I knew how to facilitate the breaking through to the Suchness in the case of cows, earthworms, granite-crystals, etc., I would not do it for this break-through would not be Enlightenment. For, remember, the Suchness is just as much darkness as IT is Light. In the case of the insufficiently evolved the breakthrough would mean return to darkness and that is not Enlightenment. In order that the breakthrough shall be Enlightenment the relative consciousness must have become ascendent over the Unconscious in the individual life. Only when this point is reached does denial of the will-to-live lead to something higher. Only the few, even among men, have evolved the relative consciousness principle to this point.

Now, once the above is granted, the hierarchical principle becomes significant. And it is significant not only in the relative order qua relative, but with respect to Enlightenment itself.

But if we grant the existence of and relevance of evolution it becomes arbitrary to view man as the end-product. There must be the trans-human, whether we call such gods or by any other name. Relations in the whole hierarchy can become significant even for the way of Enlightenment.