

San Fernando, CA  
January 11, 1931

Dr. Albert Einstein  
California Institute of Technology  
Pasadena, CA

Esteemed Sir:

There has just come before my attention a brief statement of your beautiful mystical philosophy or Cosmic Religion and it has flashed into my consciousness with rather an overwhelming force that you have become the focal point for the expression of a true religious basis that has become a crying need in the Occident which can no longer be satisfied in its depths by the outworn creeds and forms of current religiosity.

It seems to me that Count Hermann Keyserling has correctly stated the problem when he said that the soul-need of the Occident in the present day that are intellectually or scientifically unsatisfactory. There has been a general intellectual awakening which has extended too far for large portions of mankind to be satisfied spiritually by forms that are intellectually crude or scientifically untrue. At the same time this intellectual enlightenment has not gone far enough to be safe save with the few.

In other words intellectual development has proceeded so far ahead of its necessary moral modulus that there is real danger of our present intellectual construction proving to be a Frankenstein monster turning upon and destroying its creator. The moral debacle of the recent Great War only too clearly shows the danger threatening our civilization. As Bertrand Russell put it, we are in a position where either we must rise much higher than ever realized in known history or we will fall much lower.

There is a question in my mind but that the spiritual principles enunciated by the Liberated Sages of the past are eternal and are adequate for every inner need of man. I refer to figures such as Gautama Buddha, Shankara, Jesus, Lao-tzu and others of similar grade of spiritual insight. But the old forms of expression of these immortal men are no longer vital today except with a limited number who are themselves more or less liberated. The need is, as I see it, for a new vehicle of expression that will be convincing to the form of intellectual consciousness which dominates the world today, especially the Occident. It is this need which it seems to me you are supplying as no one else does and perhaps as no one else can. This is true because of your unquestioned dominance in the key-science of all physical sciences.

Our need is in large part an effective language. I am not using the term "language" with its purely surface connotation of words, sentences, etc., but in the sense of a form adequate to carry significance to consciousness at its present stage of development. The poetic and imaginative forms of the Hindus were adequate in their setting, but they are not convincing to our modern scientific field. Yet at present it is impossible to get anything like an adequate vehicle for the expression of Significance without drawing upon the Sanskrit. This is for the reason that there are vast numbers of Sanskrit terms conveying shadings of meaning that are quite inexpressible in

current English terms or in the forms of any European language. In my opinion the one exception to this statement is found in the field of mathematics.

As my own college studies centered on the domain of mathematic, especially in connection with its correlation with philosophy or metaphysics, I have had some realization of the profound mysticism which underlies the whole of mathematics and becomes especially marked in the field of the transfinite. It is literally true that it was through this antecedent training in mathematics that I was able to see the thought of men like Gautama Buddha and Shankara as a rational whole grounded in mystical profundity. I have no doubt that within mathematics lies the same underlying Wisdom which forms the common substance of all great Sages. Is it not possible, then, that somehow out of mathematics, or mathematics in combination with physical science we will find the adequate language to express mystical profundity in a form which will command both the attention and respect of our present externally intellectualized public? It is my conviction that such is the case and that you have become in a peculiar way the focal point for such expression.

I am not blind to the fact that there are other mystical modes which stand in a position that is complementary rather than consonant with the one you so well express. Count Keyserling, I should say, is the most prominent exemplar of this complementary mode that we see upon the Occidental horizon today. He views mathematics as the most external instead of the most internal mode of thought. At this point, I must confess that he irritates me. But none the less I find him creatively stimulating in a most profound sense and there is no doubt but that his consciousness is rooted well in the depths of profundity.

Between the currents which you and he represent there is a striking incompatibility. Now as I look back over known instances of mystical and metaphysical realization I find the continuance of these two modes quite persistent. Thus the Krishna of Indian tradition has much in common with Keyserling while the exquisite rational spirit of Shankara is a continuation of the same fundamental line you have expressed. It seems to me that the significance contained in the presence of these apparently antithetical modes is that they are really complementary aspects of a primary Reality which in its own Being is essentially inexpressible. The keynote of these two modes seems to be expressed in a synthesis through Vitality, represented by Keyserling, and a synthesis through Intelligence, represented by you. Or to use terms I have found helpful, the first mode is rooted in Perception and the second in Apperception.

I find myself in the same profound harmony with your thought that I find when I read Shankara. It seems in both cases that I am reading the expression of my most inward realization, only in a thought language more beautifully finished than I am able to produce. Now, as I feel this fundamental sympathy with what you have said, I have presumed to write you relative to playing a part in nurturing that current that has found a fount in you. It is true that spiritual and mystical sources are original and therefore superior to any human authority. But those human units who can stand on this primary basis alone and unaided are all too few. The majority require an image to which to attach their faith until in time they also have grown the strength to stand alone.

The Buddhas and the Christ and the other Sages serve us in a twofold way. They bring us the precepts born out of the intimate union with Wisdom and also they themselves become concrete

images to sustain and inspire men, the vast majority of us who are not yet freed. I suggest that you, more than any other in this day, stand in a position to perform this transcendent service. For you are a recognized master in just precisely the field that even the hardest minds among us must perforce respect. Hence you are peculiarly the basis in the West for the expression of that which the politico-religious Sage of present day India has called Satyagraha or "Truth-Force."

I am well aware that every true Sage dreads to become himself a central figure or focus of attention of devotees. As Plato said long ago, the Sage ever seeks solitude and isolation from the rush of affairs. But in the name of the common good Plato proposed in his Republic to compel these very Sages to take the limning place in the forefront among men. For they alone who have reached that point of Wisdom where they fain would shun the focus of multitudinous eyes are alone able to sustain themselves effectively upon that altitude. It is not an easy place for the Sage but it affords opportunity for that perfect service which saves many a soul from that morass of despair of lost faith. And the science of today that has built such unexampled power over external nature on one side, has yet in a more serious sense proven a devastating destroyer for the many who through that very science have lost confidence in soul-sustaining Truth Force. Only he who stands strong in the graces of this same science can restore the inner Light which she seems to have destroyed in the eyes of many.

To be sure, no Sage after having once spoken can prevent his ultimate canonization as his uttered words become the public possession. If such a one would avoid this he must from the beginning seal his lips with silence. But you have spoken and your words have become at least a potential Light. I fain would add my part, however small it may be, to the end that that Light may become more fully recognized among men. In this I would value greatly your individual approval, however much you are unavoidably and impersonally already such an illuminating focus for all of us who have seen.

With the esteem that belongs only to the scholar who is also a Sage, I am

Most sincerely yours,

[Franklin Merrell-Wolff]