
THE FRANKLIN MERRELL-WOLFF FELLOWSHIP NEWSLETTER

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The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship is a publicly supported, non-profit corporation whose mission is to educate the public about the twentieth-century American philosopher Franklin Merrell-Wolff through his writings, audio recordings, teachings, and life. Our activities include publishing and distributing his works, and the sponsorship of forums and events to study and discuss the life and work of Franklin Merrell-Wolff, as well as to explore the connection between Wolff's teachings and those of other traditions.

A Message from the Chair

Chuck Post

Whatever your thoughts and practices are at this time of year, we all agree this season represents renewal.

New life. A new cycle.

But why wait a whole year to celebrate renewal?

Every breath is a renewal, a rebirth.

If every breath is a renewal, so is every thought.

The breath involves the whole being, what Wilbur would call the "centaur." The awareness of ourselves as both physical and mental; using body awareness to yield to the moment.

Franklin's jñana path emphasizes the mental.

There, too, there is the potential for renewal, in every idea. That we can "see" our thoughts from some distance, is already an awakened state.

Enjoy the new light of the season, and the new light of the moment.

In this Issue

Franklin Merrell-Wolff was eager to have the academy engage his life's work. Moreover, he was not interested seeing scholars simply provide an interpretation or apologetic for his oeuvre; rather, his desire was for others to critically analyze this material. We are pleased to report that a young Dutch scholar—David Vliegenthart—has written his Master's Thesis on Wolff, and is currently working on a dissertation that focuses on Wolff's life and work.

In this issue of the Fellowship's newsletter, you will find an interview of David conducted by Chuck Post. David recently visited the United States on a Fulbright scholarship to conduct some research on Wolff, and the Fellowship was delighted to have him speak to us at our Board meeting this past October.

This issue also contains some "reflections on Yogi" by John Flinn. John was one of Wolff's companions after the death of Gertrude (Wolff's second wife). You may have seen some of John's sketches that are posted on the Fellowship's website (under the Forums tab).

Next in this issue is an update on our "wikiquotes" project, which has just completed its first phase with the publication of an e-book of quotations from Franklin Merrell-Wolff.

In his reflections, John Flinn alludes to some discord in the community of Wolff's students. In a brief note, we provide an update on the Fellowship's lawsuit against its founder.

Finally, we end this issue—as usual—with a quote from Franklin Merrell-Wolff.

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An Interview with David Vliegthart

By Chuck Post

I sat down with David Vliegthart on the morning of October 19, 2015 at a residence in Santa Barbara, California. A PhD candidate at Groningen University in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, David, a Dutch citizen, has written a master's thesis on Franklin Merrell-Wolff and, as he explains below, is also writing his dissertation on Wolff. Along with his understanding of the history of philosophy and religion, I found this interview both a pleasure and an education. I followed up with some questions via email.

CP: To start, please tell me about yourself.

DV: I was born in Dordrecht, Holland thirty-four years ago. I am divorced with a son of five. As you know, I am on a Fulbright scholarship. Franklin Merrell-Wolff was the focus of my Master's Thesis and now my PhD dissertation.

CP: Have I counted your graduate degrees correctly? Three, and working on a fourth?

DV: Yes, I have Master's Degrees in Business Communication, Philosophy, and the Philosophy of Religion. My current work at Groningen University in Holland is toward a PhD in the Philosophy of Religion.

CP: Where did you first encounter Franklin's work, and why did you select him for your academic work?

DV: I first learned about him on a website and began to look into him. I found copies of his books, and finally proposed him as a subject for academic treatment. One of the strengths of my proposal was that Wolff is so little known. Thus my work would be original.

CP: Can you explain further about your interest in his work?

DV: Wolff work is an example of what some academics call a "Self-Religious Movement" (SRM). Without use of the term, your readers will recognize the new age era of the 1960s and 1970s. There was a similar search for meaning in the West a century ago that probably influenced Wolff's own path. There was an interest in non-dual (monistic) thought then, as there is now.

CP: You use the term 'non-dualism'. Can you explain the term for me?

DV: The term is used, let's say, to describe the reintegration of mind and body. Dualism, aside from its meaning generically, is often used to refer to the split ascribed to the Enlightenment philosopher, René Descartes. Thus, non-dualism, or monism, holds the view that we can integrate mind and body—no "waiting for heaven." Monists hold the expectation of higher states of consciousness in this lifetime: "as above, so below."

CP: Putting Franklin into an historical perspective is quite useful. Can you say more?

DV: Correlating Wolff's work with other events in the United States can be revealing. In 1893 there was the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. This was a major cultural event and instrumental in ushering in greater awareness, and acceptance, of non-dual belief systems. Many non-dual belief systems have originated in Asia. Taking another pass at defining this term, "non-dual consciousness" refers to a reality beyond subject-object consciousness (which rules out our everyday state of awareness).

CP: Yes. And it was the promise of such transcendental awareness that induced Franklin to leave his promising academic career path at Stanford University to pursue these consciousness states. Was there anything else about his historical context that might help explain Franklin's lifework?

DV: Your readers are no doubt aware of the influence of Theosophy on the Western mind at the time of Wolff's development. He found commonality with the American beachhead of Theosophy in California.

In later years, with greater international travel and communication, and even liberalized immigration policies, many foreign-born spiritual leaders have come to the United States. But in Wolff's time, a few Caucasian leaders took up the challenge of bringing Eastern, non-dual philosophies to these shores. Wolff was in a sense before his time, which was noted by John Lilly when he helped Wolff to republish his books in the 1970s—a more receptive time.

CP: I know we have barely scratched the surface here. Your putting Franklin's work in its historical place is enlightening (small E!) for me, and I hope for the Fellowship. When is the projected date for publication of your PhD dissertation?

DV: Roughly two years; 2017, perhaps.

CP: We look forward to that, and your next visit to the United States. To close, would you give me a brief synopsis of both your master's thesis and your dissertation?

DV: In my master's thesis, I compared the teachings in the later published work of Franklin Merrell-Wolff, that is, post-1936, with those of other Eastern and Western traditions, and in particular, Advaita Vedanta and German Idealism. Although my focus then was not on his socio-historical context, I did suggest that Franklin Merrell-Wolff presented—perhaps it's better to say anticipated—a typical form of Self-Religion. 'Self-Religion' is a term some scholars of religion use to refer to (a certain kind of) New Age spirituality that offers an eclectic ideology in which "Self-Realization" is a recurrent central theme.

In my PhD dissertation, I am taking a more socio-historical approach to the entire life and teaching of Franklin Merrell-Wolff, before and after 1936, as presented in his published as well as unpublished early and later work. I argue that there is tension in his intellectual methods and theories, which are built around an anti-intellectual claim to an ineffable Realization; moreover, I argue that this represents a typical development among new religious movements in late modern western culture in general and American culture in particular, whereby highly rational methods and theories are used to describe and legitimate something that is said to transcend reason. I refer to this development as an increasing intellectual anti-intellectualism or, in more popular terms, "reasoned flights beyond reason."



Reflections on Yogi

By John Flinn

With cool October at last drawing near, always filled with memory and thoughts of Franklin, my long ago time with him and the long time since, I'm grateful for this chance to share something of that reflection.

In this thirtieth year after his passing, the Philosophy has reached an ever growing number of people from all over this wired World, a truly wonderful thing and reason to be glad. Many good and fine minds connect and share the Dharma, with Franklin's open door being our common bond.

I am sorry for the rift in this community of seekers. Being friends with both parties since before the great divide, I'm obliged to find a middle path through the quarrel, to respect, love and support each.

"Everyone hurts." Everyone contributes and

is worthy.

His directive, early on, was to be sure not to get hung up on him as person or guru but to have primary focus on the teaching and philosophy. Thus, he frees us to study and learn from and have deep and vital relationship to other teachers and traditions.

It parallels the words of the Carpenter: Do not praise me. Praise Him who sent me.

I have to laugh at myself and keep a sense of humor about all this. I think Yogi would be a little more than embarrassed at how I describe my walk with him, and would no doubt discourage such expression. I think he'd be horrified. And spank me. And then encourage me to use a more philosophically detached choice of words.

Following that thought, I wrote the few lines below, in an effort to cast it in different form, to be more analytical and clear:

A person becomes identified with the Light.

The enlightened one becomes teacher and guru.

For the chela, the guru is the Light.

To walk with the guru is to walk with the Light.

In time, the guru passes.

For the chela, the walk continues and the road goes ever on. The guru now resides not in a person alone, but within and without, in all persons and all creatures, in all the World about.

The guru makes only a brief appearance in our lives.

The inner guru is before, during and after.

Guru and inner guru are one.

For guru and chela, the bond is never broken, the dance is never done.

It seems to me, we are all chelas and, in the gift of Time, it is certain that we all shall find that guru within you without you, the One who awaits our attention, one Whose secret identity is the Burning Bush, God Himself, Yahweh. Brahman, the One Without a Second. The Giant Weirdness. Buddha Nature.

That Consciousness Thing.

“The scriptures admit no duality.” said the Noble Surfer.

That's my story and I'm stickin' to it.



Wikiquotes Project

We are delighted to inform our Fellows that the first edition of *The Wisdom of an American Yogi: Quotations from Franklin Merrell-Wolff* has been published (you have received a link to this volume in the email that announces this newsletter). This is an ongoing and collaborative project of members of the Fellowship, who have submitted (and in some cases, commented on) their favorite quotes from Franklin Merrell-Wolff. Thanks to all of you who have submitted quotes!

As noted above, this is the first edition of this eBook—it will be reissued as we continue to gather more quotations. You may submit additional quotes after you logged into the Fellowship's website: simply navigate to FMW Quotations under the 'Fellows Page' tab that appears after you have logged in. A copy of this edition of the book may also be retrieved under this tab.



The Fellowship's Dispute with its Founder

A number of Fellows have asked why the Board of the Fellowship has not publicly commented on its lawsuit against Doroethy Leonard, and why it does not respond to statements made by Mrs. Leonard about the Fellowship and its officers. Simply put, the Board believes that all parties involved would be best served if this matter was resolved outside of the spotlight, and it has endeavored to act in accordance with this belief. Moreover, the Board wishes to follow the example and advice of Franklin Merrell-Wolff. There were, for example, a number of occasions in Wolff's life when he was accused of acting inappropriately, and during these episodes he simply chose not to defend himself.

The lawsuit itself has entered a new phase. After a court-mandated settlement conference, both parties agreed to have the dispute settled by an arbitrator. This process will include the use of a neutral third party knowledgeable about Wolff who will assist the arbitrator in determining the existence of any items in the Wolff Archive that remain undelivered.

Finally, let us note that in this, and in all matters, the Fellowship strives to act in accordance with Wolff's guidance, as stated at the end of his 1983 interview with Joel Morwood:

I recommend the most honorable kind of life that you can live: In all human relationships to cultivate the attitude that the end is the triumph of good—not my good, but Good as such.



A Quote from Franklin Merrell-Wolff

Thus, when a man learns to become detached with respect to his pet opinions or ideas, and is willing to accept conclusions quite counter to his preferences when either evidence or logic points that way, then he is practicing asceticism in a higher and nobler sense. This kind of asceticism does cut far deeper into the real vitals of a man than any restraint connected with the mere carnal nature, and if he can succeed in the higher discipline then anything remaining in the lesser nature requiring to be purified becomes a mere detail (*Experience and Philosophy*, pp. 161-62).

The Franklin Merrell-Wolff Fellowship

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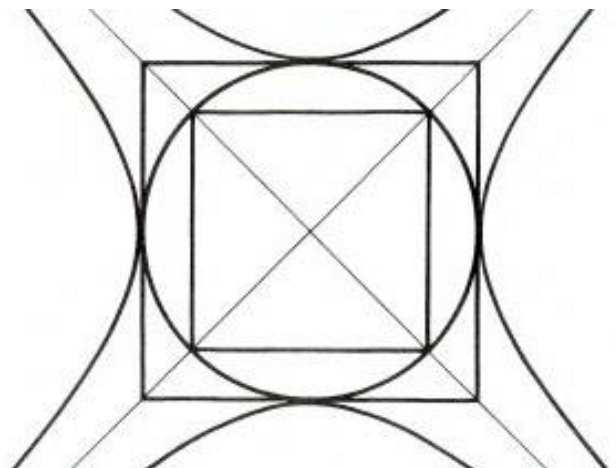
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