

*On the Alleged Tibetan Source  
of Alice Bailey's Writings*

by David Reigle, *Fohat*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1997

A new magazine called *Fohat* is now launched to promote the search for truth. Meanwhile, my Book of Dzyan research proceeds in the search for *fohat*. The term *fohat* has so far not been located in Tibetan Buddhist texts where H. P. Blavatsky's statements about it lead us to believe it should be found. I must therefore postpone any statements about *fohat* for a future occasion. My research in the Tibetan Buddhist texts, however, has allowed me to make some observations regarding the alleged Tibetan source of Alice Bailey's writings which may be of interest to readers of a magazine described by its editor as, "dedicated to promoting a vigilant attitude among its readership through a love of Truth."

To get an accurate picture of what is being investigated, it must be evaluated in terms of overall wholes; that is, in terms of what characterizes it throughout, rather than in terms of isolated facts, as the latter may lead to false conclusions. Alice Bailey's writings include eighteen books said by her to have been received through mental telepathy from a Tibetan teacher. What characterizes these writings from the first volume to the last is the teaching of service to humanity. This, of course, does agree with the Bodhisattva ideal of dedicating one's life to benefiting others rather than seeking one's own liberation, which characterizes Tibetan Buddhist writings from beginning to end. This teaching, however, also characterizes Theosophy. Thus it could have been taken by Bailey from Theosophy, or it could in fact have come from the alleged Tibetan author of the Bailey writings.

There is a peculiar stylistic feature which characterizes the Bailey writings, something one does not usually see in English language writings. This is the habitual presentation of teachings within an outline structure using general topics, then divided into sub-topics, then subdivided into sub-sub-topics, etc., etc.; e.g.: "We will as usual divide our subject into three heads."<sup>1</sup> This is a well-known characteristic feature of Tibetan writings. In fact, this feature is so characteristic of Tibetan writings that respected Buddhistologist Prof. Ernst Steinkellner of the University of Vienna used it as the criterion to determine whether certain books were written by Indians or by Tibetans. "Steinkellner observes that these two treatises display the analytical system used by Tibetans of all epochs to structure their texts, the "divisions" or "sections" (*sa bcad*), a technique he has not been able to find in treatises of Indian origin; . . ."<sup>2</sup> Certainly this stylistic evidence is as compelling as is the handwriting analysis evidence given by Dr. Vernon Harrison in his 1986 article on the infamous "Hodgson Report" to show that the Mahatmas, and not Blavatsky, wrote the Mahatma Letters.<sup>3</sup> Theosophists who are glad to accept the latter as evidence in support of the authenticity of the Mahatma authorship of the Mahatma letters must by the same standard accept the former as evidence in support of the authenticity of the Tibetan authorship of the Bailey writings.

One of the most defining teachings of the Bailey writings is that on the five initiations, given in her first book, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 1922, used throughout her writings, and given its final elaboration in her last book, *The Rays and the Initiations*, 1960. Although some of this material was first published in *The Theosophist*, including a three-part article on initiation in 1921, partly under her former name Alice Evans, this teaching really became known in the Theosophical movement through C. W. Leadbeater's *The Masters and the Path*, 1925. While the idea of initiation is not new, these teachings on the initiations are not found in the earlier Theosophical writings of Blavatsky, but are considered by many to have originated with Bailey.

One of the most defining teachings of Tibetan Buddhism is the teaching of the path to Buddhahood in terms of five

divisions. It is taught in the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, the single most widely studied book in Tibet. This book is said to have been received from the future Buddha, Maitreya, when Asaṅga after developing the Great Compassion was able to visit him where he resides in Tuṣita heaven. It was memorized by the monks of virtually all the monasteries; and most of the great Tibetan teachers wrote commentaries on it, including Bu-ston, Dol-po-pa, Tsong-kha-pa, etc., etc. Yet this book never reached China, the other and earlier recipient of Mahāyāna Buddhism from India. Thus for the last millennium it has been a teaching specific to Tibet. The five divisions of the path to Buddhahood taught in the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* are: the path of accumulation [of merit through service to others] (*sambhāra-mārga*), the path of application [to meditation practice] (*prayoga-mārga*), the path of seeing [when for the first time one sees the truth directly] (*darśana-mārga*), the path of cultivation of [higher] meditation (*bhāvanā-mārga*), and the path of no-more-training (*aśaikṣa-mārga*).

These five paths are not called initiations, and there seems to be no obvious connection between the Buddhist paths and the Bailey initiations, other than the mere number five. While studying these, however, I noticed some unusual coincidences between them. For example, the third initiation of the Bailey scheme is said to be the first major initiation: “As I have said, the first two initiations—those of the Birth and the Baptism—are not regarded by the Hierarchy as major initiations. They are in the nature of initiations of the threshold and are simply phases of, or preparatory to, the third initiation (as occult students call it), which is in reality the first major initiation.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the third path of the Buddhist scheme is said to be the first major path: “Here begins the Path proper, the Path of the Saint.”<sup>5</sup> “The last three [paths] represent ‘the Path of the Saint’ (*ārya-mārga*), whereas the first two are regarded as subservient degrees.”<sup>6</sup> But this parallel is still too general to allow any valid conclusions. There is, however, a teaching which is quite specific to Bailey regarding the fourth initiation, being not found even in Leadbeater, and is unique enough to have

aroused controversy and even ridicule. This is the teaching that “at the fourth initiation the lower vehicles go, and the adept stands in his intuitional body, and creates from thence his body of manifestation.”<sup>7</sup>

In the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* (2.30) the five paths are correlated with the ten grounds (*bhūmi*), which had been taught in the earlier *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*. All but the first of these ten *bhūmis* are achieved on the fourth path. So it is on the fourth path that occurs what I here give in the words of Étienne Lamotte, perhaps the greatest translator of Buddhist texts in our time: “Now, from the eighth *bhūmi* onward, a bodhisattva abandons his flesh body (*māṃsakāya*) born from his father and mother, produced by his karmic actions, and subject to birth and death, in order to be clothed in a body born of the Absolute (*dharmadhātujakāya*).”<sup>8</sup> With this parallel we have, to my mind, left the realm of coincidence.

It should be noted that access to the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* was opened up in the West only in 1929 with the publication of a Sanskrit-Tibetan edition by T. Stcherbatsky and E. Obermiller in the Bibliotheca Buddhica series from Leningrad. This was followed by Obermiller's English language study of it, “The Doctrine of Prajñā-pāramitā as exposed in the Abhisamayālaṅkāra of Maitreya,” published in *Acta Orientalia* in 1932. Since such journals are generally accessible only to scholars, we reprinted this text in 1984 hoping to make it more accessible to others. In any case, neither Bailey nor anyone else in the West had access to this material in 1922 when *Initiation, Human and Solar* was published. Bailey's information, as cited above, could not have been taken from earlier Theosophical writings, since it is not found there; nor could it have been taken from earlier Buddhist writings, since it is not found there either. The Buddhist writings available at that time, and even in Blavatsky's time, such as R. Spence Hardy's *Eastern Monachism*, or Emil Schlagintweit's *Buddhism in Tibet*, give only the fourfold Hīnayāna scheme of stream-enterer (*śrota-āpanna*), once-returner (*sakṛd-āgāmin*), non-returner (*anāgāmin*), and *arhat*. Leadbeater must be given credit for checking these sources and

attempting a correlation between these four and the initiations. However, this fourfold scheme does not agree with the fivefold Mahāyāna scheme taught in the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*. Although the fourfold scheme is in fact found in the Perfection of Wisdom texts which the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* is a commentary on, the latter text did not use this scheme. This is because, according to Tibetan tradition, the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* gives the secret meaning (*sbas don*) of the Perfection of Wisdom texts.<sup>9</sup> Its fivefold scheme giving the secret meaning, said to have been received from Maitreya, was not known outside of Tibet and Mongolia until the publication of the work of Stcherbatsky and Obermiller. This all points to Bailey's actual contact with a Tibetan teacher.

Perhaps the biggest objection raised by Theosophists against a Tibetan source of the Bailey writings is the latter's frequent use of "God." Tibetans, like Buddhists everywhere, do not believe in God. For Theosophists, however, this is a sword which cuts both ways; for neither do they believe in *ātman*. In fact, it is not denial of God which for Buddhists defines their religion as Buddhist against all other religions, but denial of *ātman*.<sup>10</sup> Yet *ātman* is taught throughout Blavatsky's writings whose source is supposed to be the Tibetan Mahatmas. Does this mean that Blavatsky's writings could not have had a Tibetan source? If for Theosophists it does not, then they cannot say that Bailey's use of "God" precludes a Tibetan source for Bailey's writings.

Then there is the further question of whether not just a Tibetan, but a Tibetan Mahatma, could be the source of teachings using "God." Although the vast majority of Theosophists are believers in a God, many of the more serious students accept as authoritative K.H.'s clear statements from Mahatma Letter 10: "Neither our philosophy nor ourselves believe in a God, least of all in one whose pronoun necessitates a capital H. . . . Therefore, we deny God both as philosophers and as Buddhists."<sup>11</sup> Yet Rājani Kant Brahmachārin, a Hindu believer in God on pilgrimage in Tibet, tells us of his meeting with Mahatma K.H.: "As long as I was there with the said Lama, he never persuaded me to accept Buddhism or any other religion,

but only said, 'Hinduism is the best religion; you should believe in the Lord Mahādeva—he will do good to you.'"<sup>12</sup> If we accept this account as genuine, and Blavatsky certainly did, as she printed it in proof of the existence of the Mahatmas, whether it was K.H. or another Tibetan Mahatma, we have a Mahatma encouraging a believer's belief in a God. Must we then conclude that these Mahatmas are at best inconsistent, or at worst invented by Blavatsky? Most of us, I believe, would prefer to take a more charitable view and allow that a Tibetan Mahatma could himself hold very distinct views denying the existence of God, and yet give teachings to specific individuals which allow and even encourage their already existing belief in God. For research to be valid it cannot use two sets of standards. If we hold a charitable view toward our own teachings, to be consistent we must allow the possibility that a Tibetan Mahatma who does not believe in God, when addressing a population which does believe in God, might choose a presentation which allows and even encourages that belief.

The Bailey students, who are predominantly Christian or New Age, are less likely to undertake the study of a book which is Buddhist and at least 1,500 years old, even one by Maitreya. So I have written this article to Theosophists who in their search for truth may wish to study the actual book used in Tibet, the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*. The book is extremely concise and difficult, giving one technical term after another, all of which require extensive explanation. Thus Tsong-kha-pa's commentary on its mere 273 verses covers 710 folios, or 1,420 pages. Because of its complexity, even with the flowering of Tibetan Buddhism in the West in the last couple decades, no new books on it have so far reached the public. Much new material on it, however, has become available in the academic community since the early 1930s; and I have utilized this in preparing a new Sanskrit-Tibetan edition of it, correcting the errors found in the 1929 edition, for the benefit of those who wish to study it in the original.

NOTES

1. *Letters on Occult Meditation*, by Alice Bailey, 1922, p. 325.
2. From *Śālistamba Sūtra and Its Indian Commentaries*, by Jeffrey D. Schoening, Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 1995, vol. 1, p. 26, referring to: "Who is Byañ chub rdzu 'phrul? Tibetan and non-Tibetan Commentaries on the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* — A Survey of the Literature," by Ernst Steinkellner, *Berliner Indologische Studien*, vol. 4/5, 1989, p. 235.
3. "J'Accuse: An Examination of the Hodgson Report of 1885," *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, vol. 53, 1986.
4. *The Rays and the Initiations*, by Alice Bailey, 1960, p. 663.
5. "The Doctrine of Prajñā-pāramitā as exposed in the Abhisamayālaṃkāra of Maitreya," *Acta Orientalia*, vol. XI, 1932, reprint, Talent, Oregon: Canon Publications, 1984, p. 21.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
7. *Letters on Occult Meditation*, by Alice Bailey, 1922, p. 339. Note that this book, like *Initiation, Human and Solar*, was published in 1922; and both are said by Bailey to consist of material received by her (through mental telepathy) starting in the late Fall of 1919.
8. From preface by Lamotte to *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa: The Treatise on Action by Vasubandhu*, by Étienne Lamotte, English translation by Leo M. Pruden, Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1988, p. 10.
9. *Doctrine of Prajñā-pāramitā as exposed in the Abhisamayālaṃkāra of Maitreya*, p. 7.
10. See: *What the Buddha Taught*, by Walpola Rahula, chap. VI, "The Doctrine of No-Soul: Anatta."
11. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, chronological edition, pp. 269-270.
12. "Interview with a Mahātmā," first published in *The Theosophist*, Aug. 1884, then reprinted in *Five Years of Theosophy*, 1885.

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