

The Tibetan Tetralogy of W. Y. Evans-Wentz: A Retrospective Assessment - Part I

Iván Kovács



*The Dharma-Kaya of thine own mind thou shalt see; and seeing
That, thou shalt have seen the All – The Vision Infinite, the Round
of Death and Birth and the State of Freedom.*

Milarepa, *Jetsun-Khabum*²

Abstract

This article is part of a series of articles dealing with four early 20th century Tibetologists. The first article of the series dealt with the life and work of the French Tibetologist, Alexandra David-Néel, and was published in the Winter 2014 issue of the *Esoteric Quarterly*. The present article takes a closer look at the life and work of the American Tibetologist, W. Y. Evans-Wentz. It begins with his biography, which mainly deals with his travels and the circumstances of his scholarship and writing. This is followed by a short summary of his Tibetan tetralogy. Then each of his four books is discussed in greater detail, including the commentaries and forewords by scholars and commentators such as Donald S. Lopez, Jr., C. G. Jung, Lama Anagarika Govinda, Sir John

Woodroffe, and W. Y. Evans-Wentz's own comments. When appropriate, excerpts from the texts of the translations are themselves sampled and discussed, and often comparisons and parallels drawn between various schools of thinking, so that the texts are thereby more colorfully elucidated. The conclusion briefly discusses the merits and sincerity of Evans-

About the Author

Iván Kovács is qualified as a fine artist. As a writer he has published art criticism, short stories and poems, and more recently, articles of an esoteric nature. He is a reader of the classics and modern classics, a lover of world cinema, as well as classical and contemporary music. His lifelong interest in Esotericism was rounded off with several years of intensive study with the Arcane School.

Wentz's scholarship and his importance as a pioneering Tibetologist. Due to the length of this article it was found to be more practicable to publish it in two parts, Part I concluding with the discussion of the first book of Evans-Wentz's tetralogy, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The remaining three books and the conclusion to this article will be discussed in a forthcoming issue of the Esoteric Quarterly under Part II.

W. Y. Evans-Wentz: The Biography of an Eccentric Orientalist

In the photograph preceding the frontispiece to the Oxford University Press edition of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Walter Evans-Wentz is posing with the book's translator, Kazi Dawa Samdup, dressed in the costume of a Tibetan nobleman. This is a somewhat ostentatious way of showing his alliance to, and admiration for, Tibetan culture and its philosophical and religious traditions. In many respects, Evans-Wentz's personality remains an enigma. From what little can be deduced from the variety of fragmented biographies that have been written about him, one imagines him to be rather reserved and impersonal in his dealings with people. It appears as if no one knew him intimately enough to provide a detailed character sketch, which tends to add to the mystery of his personality. This allows for little else than access to the workings of his mind as they are revealed from his copious writings.

He was born as Walter Yeeling Wentz on February 2, 1878, in Trenton, New Jersey. He only added his mother's surname, Evans, which is of Welsh origin, to his existing surname while studying at Jesus College, Oxford.³ He did this because it brought him closer to the British tradition that prevailed at such a typically English university as Oxford. His father's surname, Wentz, which is of German origin, was thus cleverly supplemented to achieve this. The truth is that he spent a much shorter time at Oxford than he did at Stanford University, where he received both his B. A. and M.A. However, he liked to project the image of an Oxford man by signing his books "W. Y. Ev-

ans-Wentz, M.A., D. Litt., D. Sc., Jesus College, Oxford."⁴

One of Evans-Wentz's biographers, David Guy, describes Evans-Wentz as "a dreamy, lonely youth, who liked to spend his afternoons lazing beside the Delaware River, sometimes (surprisingly, for a lifelong prude) without his clothes."⁵ He goes on to say that it was on one of those afternoons that Evans-Wentz had what he described an ecstatic-like vision. He had been "haunted" with the conviction "that this was not the first time that [he] had possessed a human body, but now there came a flashing into [his] mind with such authority that [he] never thought of doubting it, a mind picture of things past and to come. [He] knew from that night [his] life was to be that of a world pilgrim, wandering from country to country, over seas, across continents and mountains, through deserts to the end of the earth, seeking, seeking for [he] knew not what."⁶

Regarding Evans-Wentz's religious upbringing, biographer David Guy writes that he was raised a Baptist.⁷ But another source, a brief biographical history written by Thomas V. Peterson and William A. Clebsch, compiled from the Evans-Wentz Papers of Stanford University, states that Evans-Wentz had been raised a Unitarian in the tradition of Ralph Waldo Emerson.⁸ Regardless of which version is correct, David Guy goes on to say that as Evans-Wentz grew older, the family began to embrace the ideas of the spiritualists and freethinkers, and Evans-Wentz developed a particular interest in the occult.⁹ He was still a teenager when he read Madame Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* and thereby became interested in the teachings of Theosophy.¹⁰

Having developed an interest in theosophical literature early in his life, it was little wonder that Evans-Wentz found his way to the American Section of the Theosophical Society, which had its headquarters in Point Loma, California. This happened at the turn of the century when he became a member, and made the acquaintance of Katherine Tingley, who headed the Society. Tingley encouraged Evans-Wentz to enroll at Stanford University, where

he had the privilege to study with William James and William Butler Yeats.¹¹ When Evans-Wentz made their acquaintance, both James and Yeats were authorities in their own right. James was occupied at the time with his Gifford Lectures, which would later be published in book form as *The Varieties of Religious Experience*,¹² and Yeats was an established Irish poet who in 1903 had become President of the Irish National Theatre Society and was making his first American lecture tour.¹³

Evans-Wentz appeared to be cut out for an academic career. At Stanford, he first obtained his B.A. majoring in English and then did his M.A. under William James, from whom he developed an interest in the study of religious experience and the philosophical idea of a panpsychic reality that permeates all of human existence. After he finished his studies at Stanford, Evans-Wentz went to Europe, and in 1909, earned the Docteur-es-Lettres at the University of Rennes for literary studies dealing with Celtic folk-lore. It was at this stage that he added Evans to his name, and thereby affirmed his own part-Celtic ancestry. No sooner had he finished in Rennes, than he earned the Bachelor of Science in Anthropology from Oxford University for work done on the Celtic fairy-faith, which led to the publication of his first book, *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1911).¹⁴ It was during his practical research for the material of this book that Evans-Wentz traveled extensively through Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Cornwall, Brittany, and the Isle of Man collecting stories from the locals about pixies, fairies, and goblins.¹⁵

It might well be asked at this stage how Evans-Wentz managed to finance his extensive travels. The truth is that he had followed in his father's footsteps in the real estate business and was unusually successful. He made great profits from quick sales, mortgages and land transfers.¹⁶ By late 1913, his finances were in such a good state that he could allow himself a gentleman's existence. For this he had his father to thank, who had renegotiated his leases, and his monthly income had risen to \$1600,

which was a large amount of money in those days.¹⁷

Also, in late 1913, Evans-Wentz traveled to Ireland and visited the painter, poet and mystic AE (G. W. Russell) and W. B. Yeats, who were both living in Dublin. Next he visited the Latin countries, but was appalled by the lack of public morals in such metropolitan cities as Rome. When he crossed over to Greece he experienced it as a calmer interlude and found his visit to Delphi highly inspiring. "It is a rare privilege" he admitted, "to visit the sites where great souls of past times have lived and thought."¹⁸

After a short sojourn, Evans-Wentz's next major stop was in Egypt. Although he did not intend to stay there long either, he was caught up in the frenzy that was caused by the First World War, and he was held up in Egypt for 29 months. He kept himself busy by exploring the major sites on the shores of the Nile. Ken Winkler writes the following about him at this particular stage of his life: "For several months he just drifted along, visiting Luxor and Abydos, the home of the original cult of Osiris, the temple of the seven shrines and the temple of the 'mysteries of antiquity.'"¹⁹

Towards the end of 1915, Evans-Wentz went to Alexandria, where he was detained under suspicion of being a German spy, and had to insist on an official investigation to clear his name. By this stage, his intention was to move on and sail for India. It was an old Oxford acquaintance, T. E. Lawrence, later more popularly known as Lawrence of Arabia, who helped him realize his intention. A letter dated 12/10/16, which was written by Lawrence, reads as follows: "Dear Wentz, there is no difficulty about getting to India. To be on the safe side we have wired to ask if they can allow you to wander about as you please."²⁰

In India an array of new opportunities awaited Evans-Wentz. His first major stop was the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Adyar where he visited with Annie Besant, who was then President of the Society. Then he headed north and visited Amritsar and studied the Sikhs.²¹ He also visited many ashrams

and met with several sadhus, the most prominent among them Swami Syamananda Brahmachary; Sri Yukteswar Giri,²² who was the guru of Paramahansa Yogananda, author of *Autobiography of a Yogi*;²³ and Swami Satyananda, who would prove to be quite instrumental in Evans-Wentz's spiritual development.²⁴

In 1919, Evans-Wentz arrived in Darjeeling, a British hill station on the southern slopes of the Himalayas, where he acquired a worn Tibetan manuscript. Some sources state that it was from a monk, others that he acquired it in the bazaar. Eager to have the manuscript translated into English, Evans-Wentz made the acquaintance of the local superintendent of police, Sardar Bahadur Laden La, who provided him with a letter of introduction to Kazi Dawa Samdup, who was the headmaster of the Maharaja's Boy's School in Gangkok.²⁵

Making the acquaintance of Kazi Dawa Samdup proved to be the turning point in Evans-Wentz's life, as it would lead to the commencement of his magnum opus. The manuscript that Evans-Wentz showed to Kazi Dawa Samdup was nothing less than the *Bar do thos grol chen mo*, which under their joint handiwork would become *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. This was to be followed by the consequent publication of other Tibetan sacred texts which he also edited and annotated, and which in their totality would become his Tibetan tetralogy.²⁶

The time that Evans-Wentz and Kazi Dawa Samdup spent together amounted to no more than a few months, but their collaboration would, nevertheless, produce material for three books, namely *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1927), *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (1935), and *The Tibetan Book of the Great*

Liberation (1954). Upon completion of the translations, Evans-Wentz moved back to the ashram of Swami Satyananda to practice yoga. Kazi Dawa Samdup and Evans-Wentz met one more time before the former's appointment to the post of Lecturer in Tibetan at the University of Calcutta in 1920, but

it was a short-lived career because Kazi Dawa Samdup died in 1922. Evans-Wentz went to visit his family in 1924, and received from them a manuscript translation of *Rje btsun bka' bum* (*The Hundred Thousand Words of the Master*), which Evans-Wentz edited and published as *Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa* (1928).²⁷

After Kazi Dawa Samdup's death and prior to the outbreak of World War II, Evans-Wentz spent time traveling between the three

places that had meant the most to him, namely India, England, and California. Then his life took a bizarre turn. He settled down in a small room in the Keystone Hotel in San Diego, where he would spend the next 23 years of his life. He chose this place because it was near the city's only vegetarian restaurant and the public library. There remained one passion in his life, the discovery of his own sacred space: which was Mount Cuchama, a few miles away near the Mexican border. (It needs to be mentioned that Mount Cuchama, "the exalted high place," was once used by the Diegueno Indians as a restorative pilgrimage center.)²⁸ Having been a real estate speculator all his life, he bought up as much of the land as he could, and occasionally spent some time there to practice "the Dharma, the Buddhist 'way of truth.'"²⁹

In a late diary, Evans-Wentz wrote: "I am haunted by the realisation of the illusion of all human endeavours. As Milarepa taught; buildings end in ruin; meetings in separation; accumulation in dispersion and life in death. Whether it is better to go on here in California where I am lost in the midst of the busy multi-

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tude or return to the Himalayas is now a question difficult to answer correctly.”³⁰

Evans-Wentz died on July 17, 1965, at the age of 87. During the funeral service held for him, the traditional liturgy from *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* was recited.³¹

A short summary of the Tibetan tetralogy

In a little more than a decade it will be a hundred years since the first volume of W. Y. Evans-Wentz’s Tibetan tetralogy, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, was published. This Tibetan Buddhist text was the first ever to be translated into English, and published for the first time by Oxford University Press in 1927. It was closely followed by *Tibet’s Great Yogi Milarepa* in 1928, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* in 1935, and *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation* in 1954.³²

The way in which Walter Evans-Wentz’s name relates to his Tibetan tetralogy is neither that of author nor even as translator, but as a studious, and dare one say, somewhat obsessive compiler and editor, who wrote lengthy introductions and numerous annotations to the books that appeared under his name. He also worked hand in hand with the translator, Kazi Dawa Samdup, and in his own words describes himself as Kazi Dawa Samdup’s “living English dictionary.” There is no record regarding their precise manner of collaboration, but one can assume that Kazi Dawa Samdup’s knowledge of Tibetan was more comprehensive than that of English, and that much of the actual phrasing and terminology of the translation must have come from Evans-Wentz himself.

Although Kazi Dawa Samdup was responsible for all the translations of the first three volumes of the tetralogy, in volume four, or *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*, his handiwork only extends to Book III, which adds up to no more than 14 pages out of a total of 261.³³

The most famous volume of the tetralogy is undoubtedly the first, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, or as it is known in Tibet, the *Bar do thos grol*.³⁴ It is a funerary text, that is intended to be read to a dead or dying person so that he

or she will hear how to find liberation in the intermediate state between death and rebirth or, if that is not possible, to find an auspicious place to reincarnate in, preferably in a land that is characterized by purity.³⁵ The title of this book was inspired by another funerary text, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, because Evans-Wentz perceived parallels between the two texts, and saw in them evidence of an ancient “art of dying” which he supposed had once existed among the Egyptians, the initiates of the “Mysteries of Antiquity,” and Christians of the Middle Ages.³⁶

Donald S Lopez, Jr., Professor of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies at the University of Michigan, in his new foreword to *Tibet’s Great Yogi Milarepa*, writes as follows: “Despite the greater fame of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, it is the second volume in the tetralogy, *Tibet’s Great Yogi Milarepa* that is the most successful in the series. It has been widely used in college classes on Buddhism for decades, and excerpts from the book have appeared in numerous anthologies of Buddhist texts, often as the sole Tibetan selection.” Rather bluntly, and clearly to the discredit of Evans-Wentz, he adds: “One reason for its success is that Evans-Wentz exercised more restraint in the editing of this volume than the others.”³⁷ *Tibet’s Great Yogi Milarepa* was not the result of Evans-Wentz’s and Kazi Dawa Samdup’s collaboration, but the single-handed work of Dawa Samdup, who translated it in the period between the years 1902 and 1917, two years before Dawa Samdup and Evans-Wentz had actually met.³⁸ It is needless to say that this book is a biography, but important to point out that Milarepa is an eleventh-century yogi and poet, and the most legendary saint in Tibetan Buddhist history.

Unlike the first two volumes of the tetralogy, which are the result of single texts, the third volume, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* is a translation of seven separate texts. The first four texts originated in the Kagyu sect of Tibetan Buddhism, which is the sect of Marpa and Milarepa. The first of these contains aphorisms by Milarepa’s renowned disciple Sgam po pa, entitled *A Garland of Jewels [of] the Supreme Path*.³⁹ This work is followed by a series of texts that are very different in nature

to the prosaic tone of the aphorisms, and contain advanced tantric instructions that are normally intended for initiates and that often require considerable preparatory practice.⁴⁰ The last, or seventh text, is one of the most famous Buddhist sutras, called the *Heart Sutra*, which contains the renowned doctrine of emptiness. It is no longer than a page in length and most Buddhists know it by heart and can recite it on demand.

The fourth volume of the tetralogy, *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*, was translated by several different people. It consists of three sections or books. Book I is an English summary of portions of a work entitled the *Injunctions of Padma* (*Padma bka'i thang yig*). It is a biography of Padmasambhava, the Indian tantric yogi who is credited with introducing Buddhism to Tibet in the eighth century. The book is the result of the combined efforts of the police chief, Sardar Bahadur S. W. Laden La; a Sakya monk named Bsod nams seng ge; and Evans-Wentz.⁴¹ Book II, consists of a text which was translated by the two Sikkimese monks Lama Karma Sumdhon Paul and Lama Lobzang Mingyur Dorje. Its authorship is ascribed to Padasambhava and is entitled *The [Yoga of] Knowing the Mind, Seeing of Reality, Called Self-Liberation, From 'The Profound Doctrine of Self-Liberation by Meditation Upon the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities.'* It is part of the larger work that also contains the *Bar do thos grol*, or as it is known in English, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.⁴² The last book, Book III, is also the shortest, and is entitled *The Last Testamentary Teachings of the Guru Phadampa Sangay*.⁴³ Phadampa Sangay was a contemporary of Milarepa, who went from India to Tibet to teach the dharma.⁴⁴ The text, as mentioned above, was translated by Kazi Dawa Samdup.

The First Book of the Tetralogy: *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*

When one takes a closer look at the most-recent publication of the Oxford University Press edition of W. Y. Evans-Wentz's *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (2000), it becomes apparent that apart from the translation of the basic text, and the meticulous footnotes that go with it, there is an accumulation of additional

material which amounts to more than half of the entire book. Firstly, there is the new foreword and afterword by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., Professor of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies; four prefaces written for various editions of the book by W. Y. Evans-Wentz; a psychological commentary by the famous Swiss psychiatrist, Dr. C. G. Jung; an introductory foreword by the well-known expositor of Tibetan Buddhism, Lama Anagavika Govinda; a foreword by Sir John Woodroffe, British Orientalist and author of *The Serpent Power*; and finally a lengthy introduction with 15 subsections by Evans-Wentz himself. To do proper justice to this book it is necessary to comment on the above aspects, even if briefly, and thereby establish how they manage to provide a clearer understanding of the translated text.

Donald S. Lopez, Jr.'s Foreword

The contemporary scholar and up-to-date Tibetologist, Professor Donald S. Lopez, Jr. has provided much valuable information about Evans-Wentz's tetralogy. As regards Evans-Wentz himself, Lopez points out the following: "He never learned to read Tibetan; perhaps he did not feel it necessary, almost as if he already knew what the texts must say. And if they did not say that, there was always recourse to their esoteric meaning, something he discusses in length in his introduction to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*."⁴⁵ Lopez, nevertheless, acknowledges the importance of the tetralogy by classifying it as holding an important place in Tibetan Buddhism in the West. He also regards the tetralogy as pioneering work, not only due to the chosen texts, but also due to the mode of their creation. He points out that Evans-Wentz consulted with Tibetan scholars as regards the translations, something that only became common after the Tibetan diaspora which began in 1957.⁴⁶

Regarding Evans-Wentz's attitude towards the creation of his books, Lopez calls him audacious. Lopez says that "Evans-Wentz thought that he understood what he read, and reading, as he did, through his bifocals of Theosophy and Hindu Yoga."⁴⁷ As a consequence, Lopez accuses Evans-Wentz of departing on interpretative flights, which were influenced not only by his lifelong allegiance to Theosophy, but

also from his understanding of yoga, which he gained from his tutelage under various Hindu neo-Vedantin teachers between the two world wars. These factors caused Evans-Wentz to take unjustified liberties with the texts, such as his continued references to the need to break through the illusion of *Maya*, a concept widely known in Hinduism, but a rhetoric which is largely absent in the Tibetan texts that form the subject of his books.⁴⁸

Another important point that Lopez brings to the reader's attention as regards *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is the issue of karma and reincarnation. He points out the controversial views that are held, on the one hand, by Theosophy and, on the other hand, by Tibetan Buddhism and how Evans-Wentz attempts to explain the reason for this controversy. According to the Theosophical view, which Evans-Wentz also regarded as intended for the initiated few, he believed that just as "it is impossible for an animal or plant to devolve into one of its previous forms, so it is impossible for 'a human life-flux to flow into the physical form of a dog, or a fowl, or insect, or worm.'"⁴⁹ In contradistinction the Buddhist view is that "sentient beings wander up and down through the six realms of rebirth, blown helplessly by the winds of karma," a view that Evans-Wentz considered nothing more than the popular view intended for the masses.⁵⁰ Defending the Theosophical view, Evans-Wentz went so far as to claim "that it is a view that Kazi Dawa Samdup also endorsed, 'The late Lama Kazi Dawa Samdup was of the opinion that, despite the adverse criticisms directed against H. P. Blavatsky's works, there is adequate internal evidence in them of their author's intimate acquaintance with the higher *lamastic* teachings, into which she claimed to have been initiated.'"⁵¹

Regarding the issue of bad karma and reincarnation, one can well imagine that retribution may be exacted by having to undergo several incarnations of an unfavourable nature, but most, if not all, esotericists would agree that reincarnation in such cases into a lower life form, such as, a lowly animal would not only be ridiculous, but pointless. Compared to the consciousness of a human being, a lowly ani-

mal's consciousness is by far more limited and restrictive, thereby rendering any retributive aims of an adjustment orientated karma absolutely futile.

Despite his criticism of Evans-Wentz's approach and working methods, Lopez ends his foreword on the following positive note: "Whatever Evans-Wentz's motivations may have been in creating *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, he produced a work of vast cultural influence. For contained within Evans-Wentz's book is Kazi Dawa Samdup's translation of the *Bar do thos grol*, a translation that has continued, over the years and across the continents, to provide both insight and inspiration."⁵²

Dr. C. G. Jung's Psychological Commentary

Before commencing with a discussion of Jung's commentary of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, it is necessary to describe briefly the three distinct phases of the *bardo*, which in context of the Tibetan Buddhist belief in reincarnation is understood as the intermediate state between death and rebirth. Once this is done, attention will be paid to how Jung points out some important parallels between Eastern and Western concepts as they relate to the spiritual aspects of their respective metaphysics. There are three major parallels in Jung's commentary, namely those between Jung's concept of the Collective Unconscious and the Chikhai Bardo; Jung's archetypes and the Chönyid Bardo; and Freudian Psychoanalysis and the Sidpa Bardo. Lastly, Jung's own unique view of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* will be discussed, and how it can be put to use by Westerners as an initiatory rather than a funerary text. This can be achieved by reversing the sequence, and starting with the third phase of the *bardo* and ending with the first, and thereby arriving at the recognition of that most elevated state of consciousness, which is symbolized by the clear light, and known as the Dharma-Kaya.

In broad outlines, the three phases of the *bardo* can be defined as follows:

The first phase of the *bardo*, the Chikhai Bardo, is the recognition of that state of consciousness which transcends all other states of

consciousness, and its successful attainment makes any association with lesser types of consciousness unnecessary and redundant. It is symbolized by the image of the clear light, in itself an image of untarnished purity, and can confidently be identified with the Dharma-Kaya, the state of consciousness which is also characteristic of a Buddha.⁵³

The second phase of the bardo, the Chönyid Bardo, is also called the bardo of the experiencing of reality.⁵⁴ In this bardo the deceased person is confronted, firstly by a group of peaceful deities and, secondly a group of wrathful deities, in the form of visual and auditory projections. These projections are symbolic of the person's karma, and when rightfully meditated upon by the deceased, still allow for the regaining of the clear light, and thus liberation from rebirth. If, however, the concentration, and consequent insights gained by meditation upon these deities is unsuccessful, the deceased loses yet another opportunity, and is drawn into the third phase, the Sidpa Bardo.⁵⁵

The third phase, or Sidpa Bardo, is known as a hallucinatory state, where the dead person, who was unable to avail himself of the opportunities in the Chikhai Bardo and the Chönyid Bardo, now becomes a victim of sexual fantasies and "is attracted by the vision of mating couples. Eventually he is caught by a womb and born into the earthly world again."⁵⁶

Now that the three distinct phases of the bardo have been defined, they can serve as a basis for some comparisons that can be drawn between them and those Western concepts with which they appear to be in agreement.

The first comparison to be made is that between Jung's understanding of the soul and the Dharma-Kaya of the Chikhai Bardo. According to Jung's Germanic background, the soul (*Seele*) is not to be confused with its English meaning, which is very different, but needs to be equated with his concept of the Collective Psyche, or Collective Unconscious. The first footnote of Jung's commentary describes '*Seele*' as an ancient word, "sanctioned by Germanic tradition and used, by outstanding German mystics like Eckhart and great German poets like Goethe, to signify the Ultimate

Reality, symbolized in the feminine, or *shakti* aspect." It goes on, to state rather boldly, that "(i)n psychological language it represents the Collective Unconscious, as being the matrix of everything. It is the womb of everything, even of the *Dharma-Kaya*; it is the *Dharma-Kaya* itself."⁵⁷

A comparison such as the above is always risky, and can, at best, only partially be true. Admittedly, the Collective Unconscious is equated with the "Ultimate Reality" and the "matrix of everything," but it is also understood as being rich in psychic contents and the product of ancestral experience that contains such concepts as science, religion and morality.⁵⁸ The Dharma-Kaya, on the other hand, can only find its parallels with the Collective Unconscious to a point. It is true that it is equated with the Absolute, and considered as "the essence of the universe" and "the unity of all things and beings," but it is "unmanifested." "The dharmakaya is beyond existence or non-existence, and beyond (all) concepts. . ."⁵⁹

Perhaps the fundamental difference between the Western and Eastern understanding of the Ultimate Reality can be ascribed to the fact that Westerners are by nature suspicious of any type of consciousness that is devoid of contents. Easterners, on the other hand, don't equate the Absolute with consciousness at all, but rather consider it in terms of pure being, which transcends any type of consciousness that might limit or distort its reality by distinct qualities or concepts.

The essence of the Chikhai Bardo, as it is recited by the presiding lama to the dead person, is contained in the following words:

O nobly-born (so and so), listen. Now thou art experiencing the Radiance of the Clear Light of Pure Reality. Recognise it. O nobly-born, thy present intellect, in real nature void, not formed into anything as regards characteristics or colour, naturally void, is the very Reality, the All-Good.

Thine own intellect, which is now voidness, yet not to be regarded as the voidness of nothingness, but as being the intellect itself, unobstructed, shining, thrilling, and bliss-

ful, is the very consciousness, the All-good Buddha.⁶⁰

Apart from its sheer exuberance and poetic beauty, the above quotation is almost an unequivocal guarantee to the deceased of the true nature, the Buddha-nature, of his or her being, provided that he or she can remain single-minded, and without wavering, identify with the Clear Light, and thereby gain liberation. Life, when stripped of all its entanglements and ramifications, becomes nothing more and nothing less than the bliss of pure being. Jung, however, who obviously was able to appreciate the implications of the above passage, foresees problems as regards the mentality of the conventional Westerner, and remarks upon it as follows:

The soul [or as here, one's own consciousness] is assuredly not small, but the radiant Godhead itself. The West finds this statement either very dangerous, if not downright blasphemous, or else accepts it unthinkingly and then suffers from a theological inflation. But if we can master ourselves far enough to refrain from our chief error of always wanting to *do* something with things and put them to practical use, we may perhaps succeed in learning an important lesson from these teachings, or at least in appreciating the greatness of the *Bardo Thodol*, which vouchsafes to the dead man the ultimate and highest truth, that even the gods are the radiance and reflection of our own souls.⁶¹

The next item under consideration is the comparison between Jung's archetypes and the two groups of deities, the first peaceful, the second wrathful, which the deceased encounters in the second, or Chönyid Bardo.

An archetype, as Jung understands it, is defined as "a collectively inherited unconscious idea, pattern of thought, image, etc., universally present in individual psyches."⁶² Jung expands on this basic concept in his own words as follows:

These (the archetypes) are the universal dispositions of the mind, and they are to be understood as analogous to Plato's forms (*eidola*), in accordance with which the

mind organizes its contents. One could also describe these forms as *categories* analogous to the logical categories which are always and everywhere present as the basic postulates of reason. Only, in the case of our 'forms,' we are not dealing with categories of reason but with categories of the *imagination*.⁶³

In the above context the Chönyid Bardo and the deceased's confrontation with the peaceful and wrathful deities, (the success or failure of this confrontation being determined by the deceased person's individual karma), is a process whereby the deities or archetypes help to determine where exactly the deceased stands as regards his own status in terms of his or her psychic reality. Jung elaborates on this as follows:

Here (in the Chönyid Bardo) we seek and find our difficulties, here we seek and find our enemy, here we seek and find what is dear and precious to us; and it is comforting to know that all evil and all good is to be found out there, in the visible object, where it can be conquered, punished, destroyed or enjoyed. But nature herself does not allow this paradisaic state of innocence to continue forever. There are, and always have been, those who cannot help but see that the world and its experiences are in the nature of a symbol, and that it really reflects something that lies hidden in the subject himself, in his own transsubjective reality. It is from this profound intuition, according to *lamaist* doctrine, that the *Chönyid* state derives its true meaning, which is why the *Chönyid Bardo* is entitled 'The *Bardo* of the Experiencing of Reality.'⁶⁴

Lastly, the comparison between Freudian Psychoanalysis and the Sidpa Bardo, as understood by Jung, needs to be discussed. If Freudian psychoanalysis is understood as simply dealing with problems that are related to basic drives and urges of a physical nature, with particular emphasis on the sexual, its relevance to the Sidpa Bardo becomes clearer and more obvious. Jung elucidates on this as follows:

Freudian psychoanalysis, in all essential aspects, never went beyond the experiences

of the *Sidpa Bardo*; that is, it was unable to extricate itself from sexual fantasies and similar “incompatible” tendencies which cause anxiety and other affective states. Nevertheless, Freud’s theory is the first attempt made by the West to investigate, as if from below, from the animal sphere of instinct, the psychic territory that corresponds in Tantric Lamaism to the *Sidpa Bardo*.⁶⁵

In contradistinction to his own theory of the collective unconscious, which clearly makes allowance for all types of psychic contents, including the spiritual, Jung considers Freud’s unconscious to be limited to biological needs and urges, thus unable to advance beyond the instinctual sphere. “It is therefore not possible for Freudian theory to reach anything except an essentially negative valuation of the unconscious. It is a ‘nothing but.’”⁶⁶ Jung elaborates on this as follows:

I think, then, we can state it as a fact that with the aid of psychoanalysis the rationalizing mind of the West has pushed forward into what one might call the neuroticism of the *Sidpa Bardo* state, and has there been brought to an inevitable standstill by the uncritical assumption that everything psychological is subjective and personal. Even so, this advance has been a great gain, inasmuch as it has enabled us to take one more step behind our conscious lives.⁶⁷

Having summarized Jung’s views of the three distinct phases of the bardo in terms of his own system of psychology, one can now examine and appreciate his most innovative suggestion why the *Bardo Thödol* should be read backwards. Jung justifies this suggestion with the following:

The book describes a way of initiation in reverse, which unlike the eschatological expectations of Christianity, prepares the soul for a descent into physical being. The thoroughly intellectualistic and rationalistic worldly-mindedness of the European makes it advisable for us to reverse the sequence of the *Bardo Thödol* and to regard it as an account of Eastern initiation experiences, though one is perfectly free, if one chooses,

to substitute Christian symbols for the gods of the *Chönyid Bardo*.⁶⁸

Lama Anagarika Govinda’s Introductory Foreword

The author of the Introductory Foreword to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Lama Anagarika Govinda, was a Tibetologist and practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism. Of German origin, he was born in Waldheim, Germany in 1898. He was known to be one of the most revered Western interpreters of Buddhism and the traditional Tibetan way of life. He died in 1985.⁶⁹

Lama Govinda begins his discussion of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* with the general assumption that nobody is able to talk about death with authority unless they have died, and that since nobody, apparently, has returned from the dead, we cannot know what death is, or what happens after it.⁷⁰ However, Lama Govinda also gives an alternate view held by the Tibetans, who will respond to the above assumption as follows:

There is not *one* person, indeed, not *one* living being, that has *not* returned from death. In fact, we have all died many deaths, before we came into this incarnation. And what we call birth is merely the reverse side of death, like one of the two sides of a coin, or like a door which we call “entrance” from outside and “exit” from inside a room.⁷¹

Lama Govinda reconciles these opposing views by stating that not everybody remembers his or her previous death, and due to this lack of remembering, most people do not believe that there was a previous death. He points out that “they forget that active memory only forms a small part of our consciousness, and that our subconscious memory registers and preserves every past impression and experience which our waking mind fails to recall.”⁷² Govinda elaborates on this by referring to people who by means of concentration and other yogic practices are able to access the subconscious and bring it into the realm of the discriminative consciousness. Such people can consequently access the unrestricted treasury of subconscious memory, which contains the

records not only of our past lives, but also the records of the history of our race. Taken to its extreme, subconscious memory can potentially access not only our human past, but “all pre-human forms of life, if not the very consciousness that makes life possible in the universe.”⁷³

Lama Govinda argues that there is a good reason why the subconscious cannot readily be made conscious:

If, through some trick of nature, the gates of an individual’s subconsciousness were suddenly to spring open, the unprepared mind would be overwhelmed and crushed. Therefore, the gates of the subconscious are guarded, by all initiates, and hidden behind the veil of mysteries and symbols.⁷⁴

From this point onwards Lama Govinda discusses the significance of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and how it relates to his foregoing argument. He explains that the reason why the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* is couched in symbolic language is due to the fact that it was written for initiates, and thus “sealed with the seven seals of silence, - not because its knowledge should be withheld from the uninitiated, but because its knowledge would be misunderstood,” and thus possibly mislead and even harm those who are not intended to receive it. However, he thinks that the time has come to break the seals of silence, because humanity has reached the point where it needs to decide whether to be satisfied by merely subjugating the material world, or whether it should strive after the conquest of the spiritual world, by subjugating its selfish desires and transcending its self-imposed limitations.⁷⁵

Lama Govinda emphatically states that it is the spiritual point of view that makes the *Bardo Thodol* important for the majority of readers. If it were merely based upon folklore, or religious speculation about death and a hypothetical after-death state, it would only be of interest to anthropologists and students of religion. Lama Govinda explains that it is far more than that: “It is a key to the innermost recesses of the human mind, and a guide for initiates, and for those who are seeking the spiritual path of liberation.”⁷⁶ Although the *Bardo Thodol* is generally used in Tibet as a breviary, to be

read or recited on the occasion of death, it was originally written as a guide not only for the dying or dead, but also for the living. It is precisely this that justifies its accessibility to a wider public.⁷⁷

Lama Govinda stresses that despite its apparent purpose as a funerary text, the *Bardo Thodol* only has value for those who practice its teaching during their life-time. Once this is realised the element of death in this sacred text takes on a new meaning, namely “that it is one of the oldest and most universal practices for the initiate to go through the experience of death before he can be spiritually reborn.” The initiates need to die symbolically both as regards their past, as well as their old ego, before they can take their place in the new spiritual life into which they have been initiated.⁷⁸

The correct application of the bardo teachings depends upon remembering the right thing at the right moment, and to achieve this, it is necessary to prepare oneself during one’s life-time. Lama Govinda points out that “one must create, build up, and cultivate those faculties which one desires to be of deciding influence at death and in the after-death—in order never to be taken unawares, and to be able to react, spontaneously, in the right way, when the critical moment of death has come.”⁷⁹

Lama Govinda reminds the reader that all who are familiar with Buddhist philosophy recognize that birth and death succeed each other repeatedly and uninterruptedly, and that every moment of our lives something within us dies and something is reborn.⁸⁰ He elaborates on this as follows:

The different *bardos*, therefore, represent different states of consciousness of our life: the state of waking consciousness, the normal consciousness of a being born into our human world, known in Tibetan as the *skyes-nas bar-do*; the state of dream-consciousness (*rmi-lam bar-do*); the state of *dhyana*, or trance-consciousness, in profound meditation (*bsam-gtan bar-do*); the state of experiencing of death (*huchhi-kha bar-do*); the state of experiencing of Reality (*chhos-nyid bar-do*); the state of rebirth-consciousness (*srid-pa bar-do*).⁸¹

Referring to the teachings of the Buddha, Lama Govinda points out that it is a privilege to be born as a human being, because it allows for the rare opportunity of liberating oneself through one's decisive effort "through a 'turning-about in the deepest seat of consciousness', as the *Lankavatara Sutra* puts it."⁸² Lama Govinda specifies that "(a)ccordingly, *The Root Verses of the Six Bardos* open with the words:

'O that now, when the *Bardo of Life* is dawning upon me,
- After having given up indolence, since there is no time to waste in life -
May I undistractedly enter the path of listening, reflecting, and meditating,
So that, . . . once having attained human embodiment,
No time may be squandered through useless distractions.'⁸³

Returning to the subject of death, Lama Govinda points out that its illusoriness can be ascribed to the fact that the individual identifies with his or her temporal, transitory form, whether physical, emotional, or mental, which is the reason for the mistaken notion that there exists a personal, separate egohood of one's own, and the fear of losing it.⁸⁴ The remedy for this Lama Govinda explains as follows:

If, however, the disciple has learned, as the *Bardo Thodol* directs, to identify himself with the Eternal . . . then the fears of death are dissipated like a cloud before the rising sun. Then he knows that whatever he may see, hear, or feel, in the hour of his departure from this life, is but a reflection of his own conscious and subconscious mental content; and no mind-created illusion can then have power over him if he knows its origin and is able to recognize it.⁸⁵

Lama Govinda concludes his discussion of the *Bardo Thodol* by pointing out that the illusory bardo visions vary according to the religious or cultural tradition in which the percipient has grown up, but that their underlying motive-power is shared by all human beings.⁸⁶ His final words regarding the nature of the *Bardo* and its significance read as follows:

Thus it is that the profound psychology set forth by the *Bardo Thodol* constitutes an important contribution to our knowledge of the human mind and the path that leads beyond it. Under the guise of a science of death, the *Bardo Thodol* reveals the secret of life; and therein lies its spiritual value and its universal appeal.⁸⁷

Sir John Woodroffe's Foreword

Sir John Woodroffe introduces his foreword with two salient questions regarding the concept of death. His first question is how one may avoid death, except when death is desired; and the second, how to accept death and die.⁸⁸ He answers the first question by pointing out that "the avoidance of death is the aim when *Hathayoga* is used to prolong present life in the flesh."⁸⁹ He explains that this is not, in the Western sense, an affirmation of life, but, for the time being, to a particular form of life. He points out that in context of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, death comes to all, and that humans are not to cling to life on earth with its ceaseless wandering in the worlds of birth and death. They should rather "implore the aid of the Divine Mother for a safe passage through the fearful state following the body's dissolution, and that they may at length attain all-perfect Buddhahood."⁹⁰

Regarding the second question, "How to accept death and die," Woodroffe answers as follows: "Here (i.e. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*) the technique of dying makes Death the entrance to good future lives, at first out of, and then again in, the flesh, unless and until liberation (*Nirvana*) from the wandering (*Sangsara*) is attained."⁹¹

Woodroffe identifies both the original text and Evans-Wentz's introduction as valuable contributions to the Science of Death from the standpoint of the Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism of the Tantric type,⁹² (Tantra being understood as a technique which transforms desire into enlightenment).⁹³ He welcomes the book not only in virtue of its particular subject matter, but also because he considers the ritual works of any religion to enable us more fully to understand the philosophy and psychology of the system to which we belong.⁹⁴

More specifically, Woodroffe defines *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* in terms of three characteristics, namely as a work on the Art of Dying; “for Death, as well as Life, is an Art, though both are often enough muddled through.”⁹⁵ Secondly, he considers the book as a manual of religious therapeutic for the last moments; and thirdly as a description of the experiences of the deceased during the intermediate period between death and rebirth, and thus as a guide whereby the deceased can relate thereto.⁹⁶

Woodroffe points out that the chief difference between the four leading religions, i.e. Brahmanism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, is the doctrine of reincarnation and resurrection. He writes that Christianity recognizes one universe only, and two lives, one here in the natural body, and one hereafter, the resurrection body. Just as metempsychosis makes the same soul, so resurrection uses the same body for more than one life, but Christianity limits man’s lives to two in number, of which the first forever determines the nature of the second.⁹⁷

Woodroffe explains that for “each of the four religions . . . there is a subtle and death-surviving element,” and “to none of these Faiths is death an absolute ending, but to all it is only the separation of the *Psyche* from the gross body . . . In other words, Death is itself only an initiation into another form of life than that of which it is the ending.”⁹⁸

Regarding the moment of death, Woodroffe comments as follows:

At the moment of death the empiric consciousness, or consciousness of objects, is lost. There is what is popularly called a “swoon,” which is, however, the corollary of super-consciousness itself, or the Clear

As regards the parallels that can be drawn between the various funerary texts, Evans-Wentz concludes that they tend to strengthen the opinion that the greater part of the symbolism which is nowadays regarded as peculiarly Christian or Jewish seems to be due to adaptations from Egyptian and Eastern religions. ...they also suggest a close resemblance between the thought-forms and thought-processes of the Orient and the Occident, and that despite differences...the various nations of mankind are, and have been since time immemorial, mentally and spiritually one.

Light of the Void; for the swoon is in, and of, the Consciousness as knower of objects (*Vijnana Skandha*). This empiric consciousness disappears, unveiling Pure Consciousness, which is ever ready to be discovered by those who have the will to seek and the power to find It.⁹⁹

Defining the Clear Light of the Void, Woodroffe writes that it is not “nothingness,” but “the Alogical (sic), to which no categories drawn from the world of name and form apply.”¹⁰⁰ He states that a Vedantist would affirm that “Being,” or “Is-ness,” is still applicable as regards the Void, and

would be experienced as “is” (*asti*). According to this view, the Void is the negation of all determinations, but not of “Is-ness,” as has been supposed in accounts that are given of Buddhist “Nihilism,” but it is not anything known to finite experience in form, and thus, for those who have had no other experience, it is nothing.¹⁰¹

In context of the Buddhist Mayayana teachings, and more specifically in the Tibetan work, *The Path of Good Wishes of Samanta Bhadra*,¹⁰² Woodroffe identifies the All as either Sangsara or Nirvana, Sangsara being the world of finite experience, and Nirvana being the release from such experience, and thus

consciousness freed of all limitation. From an emotional aspect, this is experienced as pure bliss that is unaffected by sorrow, and from a volitional aspect it is freedom of action and almighty power. The realization of Nirvana, or the Void, is synonymous with the consciousness of a Buddha, or a “Knower;” the absence of such realisation is to be an “ignorant being” in the Sangsara.¹⁰³

Taking his examples from *The Path of Good Wishes of Samanta Bhadra*, and obviously intending to draw parallels with those to be found in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Woodroffe continues his discussion by pointing out that ignorance in the individual is in its cosmic aspect *Maya*, which in Tibetan (*sGyuma*) means a magical show. More specifically “(i)n its most generic form, the former is that which produces the pragmatic, but, in a transcendental sense, the ‘unreal’ notion of self and otherness.”¹⁰⁴ Woodroffe identifies this as the root cause of error, which becomes manifest as the “Six Poisons” of Sangsara – pride, jealousy, sloth, anger, greed, and lust. At this point Woodroffe points out that the Text (i.e. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and more specifically the section dealing with the *Chönyid Bardo*) constantly urges upon the dying person to recognize in the apparitions, which he is about to see, the creatures of his own maya-governed mind, which obstructs him or her from recognizing the Clear Light of the Void. If, however, this recognition is successful, the person can be liberated at any stage.¹⁰⁵

As regards the third and final stage of the intermediate state between death and rebirth, the passage into the *Sidpa Bardo*, Woodroffe explains that the past life of the deceased becomes dim, and “(t)hat of the future is indicated by certain premonitory signs which represent the first movements of desire towards fulfilment.” In accordance with the deceased’s karma, his or her “soul-complex” now takes on the color of the *Loka* (i.e. world) in which it is destined to be born. More specifically this is explained by Woodroffe as follows:

If the deceased’s *Karma* leads him to Hell, thither he goes after the Judgement, in a subtle body which cannot be injured or

destroyed, but in which he may suffer atrocious pain. Or he may go to the Heaven-world or other *Loka*, to return at length and in all cases (for neither punishment nor reward are eternal) to earth, whereon only can new *Karma* be made. Such return takes place after expiation of his sins in Hell, expiration of the term of enjoyment in Heaven which his *Karma* has gained for him.¹⁰⁶

Woodroffe points out that in some cases the deceased’s lot is immediate rebirth on earth, in which case he or she will see visions of mating men and women, and at this final stage of awakening to earth-life, is now aware of the fact that he or she does not have a physical body, and urgently desires to have one, so that he or she may again enjoy physical life on the earth-world.¹⁰⁷

Woodroffe’s conclusive remarks leave his discussion open ended. Instead of a definitive statement, he hypothesizes with some pertinent questions. He proposes that if the series of conscious states are determined by the past *Karma*, it may well be asked how that liberty of choice exists which the whole text of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* assumes by its injunctions to the deceased to do this or to avoid that.¹⁰⁸ He points out that even in one individual there are diverse tendencies, but the question still remains, and “if the *Karma* ready to ripen determines the action, then advice to the accused is useless. If the ‘soul’ is free to choose, there is no determination by *Karma*.”¹⁰⁹ Woodroffe proposes that the answer to these questions appears to be twofold. On the one hand, the instructions given may, by their suggestions, call up that one of several tendencies which tends towards the action counselled. On the other hand, this system allows that one “soul” can help another. In this regard, there are prayers for, and application of merits to, the deceased, just as one finds in Hinduism the *Pretashraddha*, in Catholicism the *Requiem Mass*, and in Islam the Moslem’s *Fatiha*. Woodroffe concludes that “(i)n this and other matters one mind can, it is alleged, influence another otherwise than through the ordinary sense channels whether before or after death.”¹¹⁰

Walter Evans-Wentz's comment on the Judgment in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*

Instead of a lengthy summary, and the unnecessary repetition of much that has been discussed under the forewords, commentaries and introductions in the above summaries, this particular summary will deal with only one of several aspects of Evans-Wentz's Introduction, namely the one which is subtitled *The Judgement*.¹¹¹ Its importance needs to be pointed out for the reason that the knowledge of the after death state, or *bardo*, appears to have its parallels not only between the two funerary texts such as *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* and the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, but also a Medieval Christian treatise entitled *The Lamentation of the Dying Creature*, the dating of which is uncertain, but probably falls within the period of the 14th and 15th centuries.¹¹² Furthermore, Evans-Wentz also makes brief mention of Plato's tenth book of the *Republic*, in which a strikingly similar judgement of the human soul is described as in the Egyptian, Tibetan and Christian examples. His first comparison is that between the Tibetan and Egyptian texts, and begins as follows:

The Judgement Scene as described in our text and that described in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* seem so much alike in essentials as to suggest that common origin, at present unknown, to which we have already made reference. In the Tibetan version, Dharma-Raja (Tib. *Shinje-chho-gyal*) King of the Dead (commonly known to Theravadists as Yama-Raja), the Buddhist and Hindu Pluto, as a Judge of the Dead, correspond to Osiris in the Egyptian version.¹¹³

Even in this brief quotation one cannot help noticing the reference to Pluto, whom every person with a basic knowledge of mythology will identify as the god of the underworld both in Greek and Roman mythology. In fact, a king, or god of death and the underworld is so universal, that one encounters him in mythologies as far afield as the Incas and the Aztecs, as well as the Pacific Islands, where, among the Maori, this deity is female rather than male, and known as Hine-nui-te-po,¹¹⁴ the goddess of

night and death, and ruler of the underworld.¹¹⁵ Parallels such as these can only be explained when we accept the reality of Jung's Collective Unconscious and its dominant archetypes, as it was discussed under Jung's Psychological Commentary.

Evans-Wentz continues his comparison as follows:

In both versions alike there is a symbolical weighing: before Dharma-Raja there are placed on one side of the balance black pebbles and on the other side white pebbles, symbolizing evil and good deeds; and similarly, before Osiris, the heart and the feather (or else in the place of the feather an image of the Goddess of Truth which it symbolizes) are weighed one against the other, the heart representing the conduct of conscience of the deceased and the feather righteousness or truth.

Regarding the above quotation, the symbol of the balance or scales, is not unique to Egypt and Tibet, but acknowledged universally as an emblem of harmony and justice, and thus an ideal instrument in the judgement of a human being at the termination of his or her earthly life. The heart is, likewise, a universal symbol of a human being's conscience, and brings to mind the words from the Old Testament in the book of Proverbs, (Chapter 23, verse 7), which read as follows: "For as (a man) thinketh in his heart, so is he . . ." ¹¹⁶ A light heart, counterbalanced by a feather, suggests the nature of a person who holds back nothing, and thus characterized by the virtue of compassion and generosity, while a heavy heart, often referred to as a "heart of stone," is descriptive of someone who is cold and devoid of true neighborly feelings.

The Egyptian Judgement Scene is presided over by the ape-headed, and sometimes more rarely, by the ibis-headed Thoth, who is the god of wisdom.¹¹⁷ As the weighing process of the deceased's heart is about to proceed, the deceased addresses his own heart as follows: 'Raise not thyself in evidence against me. Be not mine adversary before the Divine Circle; let there be no fall of the scale against me in the presence of the great god, Lord of Amen-

ta.¹¹⁸ The Tibetan Judgment Scene also has a presiding god, the monkey-headed Shinje; and in both the Egyptian and Tibetan scenes, the jury is made up of animal-headed and human-headed gods. The Egyptian version has a monstrous creature awaiting the deceased if he or she should be condemned, while the Tibetan version has devils awaiting the evil-doer ready to conduct him or her to the hell-world of purgation. The record-board of the deceased's deeds, which the god Thoth is sometimes depicted as holding, parallels the Mirror of Karma held by the Dharma-Raja.¹¹⁹ As regards the "Mirror of Karma," Evans-Wentz makes the following observation: "(T)his seems to be distinctly an Indian and Buddhist addition to the hypothetical pre-historic version, whence arose the Egyptian and the Tibetan versions, the Egyptian being the less affected."¹²⁰

Evans-Wentz's reference to Plato's tenth book of the *Republic* describes a similar judgement as in the Egyptian and Tibetan funerary texts, which also employs judges and makes use of karmic record boards that are affixed to the souls being judged, and two paths, one for the good which leads to heaven, and one for the evil that leads to hell. Like in the Tibetan version, the condemned souls are carried off by demons to the place of punishment.¹²¹

For a more detailed comparison between the texts dealing with the after-death state already treated so far and the Medieval Christian treatise, *The Lamentation of the Dying Creature*, one needs to turn to Evans-Wentz's Addenda VII entitled *The Medieval Christian Judgement*, in which the deceased is recorded to say:

"Alas that ever I sinned in my life. To me is come this day the dreadfulest tidings that ever I had. Here hath been with me a sergeant of arms whose name is Cruelty, from the King of Kings, Lord of all Lords, and Judge of all Judges, laying on me the mace of His office, saying unto me: 'I arrest thee and warn thee to make ready . . . The Judge that shall sit upon thee, He shall not be partial, nor He will not be corrupt with goods, but He will minister to thee justice and equity . . .'"¹²²

The above quotation paints a vivid picture of the state of mind of a deceased person who suddenly realizes the gravity and inevitability of having to face up to his evil deeds which he or she has committed while still alive. Dreading the consequences to be visited upon him, the deceased desperately appeals to his Good Angel:

"O my good Angel, to whom our Lord took me to keep, where be thee now? Me thinketh ye should be here, and answer for me; for the dread of death distroubleth me, so that I cannot answer for myself. Here is my bad angel ready, and is one of my chief accusers, with legions of fiends with him. I have no creature to answer for me. Alas it is an heavy case!"¹²³

The Good Angel, an obvious personification of the voice of conscience, makes it clear to the deceased that his intercession at this stage would be unjust and useless: ". . . (I) counselled thee to flee the place of peril, and the company that should stir or move you thereto. Can ye say nay thereto? How can you think that I should answer for you?"¹²⁴ In desperation the deceased now "appeals for assistance to Reason, to Dread, to Conscience, and to the Five Wits – (but) none can succour him."¹²⁵ His final appeal is to the Virgin, whose intercession to Jesus, her son, now introduces the uniquely Christian doctrine of the forgiveness of sins, which clearly differs from the doctrine of karma as it is expounded in the Buddhist teachings of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.¹²⁶

Evans-Wentz's own comment on the above is as follows:

Such introduction suggests that this curious Christian version of the Judgment may have had a pre-Christian and non-Jewish Oriental source, wherein the doctrine of *karma* (and the correlated doctrine of rebirth) remained unmodified by the European medievalism which shaped *The Lamentation of the Dying Creature*. The ancient doctrine of *karma* (to which the primitive, or Gnostic, Christians adhered, were Church-council Christianity took shape), being taught in the following answer to the Dying Creature,

gives some plausibility, even from internal evidence, to this purely tentative view:

Conscience: ‘Ye must sorrowfully and meekly suffer the judgements that ye have deserved.’

The Five Wits: ‘Therefore of your necessity your defaults must be laid upon you . . . Wherefore of right the peril must be yours.’¹²⁷

In his final remarks as regards the parallels that can be drawn between the various funerary texts, Evans-Wentz concludes that they tend to strengthen the opinion that the greater part of the symbolism which is nowadays regarded as peculiarly Christian or Jewish seems to be due to adaptations from Egyptian and Eastern religions. He observes that they also suggest a close resemblance between the thought-forms and thought-processes of the Orient and the Occident, and that despite differences of race and creed, and of physical and social environment, the various nations of mankind are, and have been since time immemorial, mentally and spiritually one.¹²⁸

Conclusion

From the above discussion and summaries, the reader must, at this stage, have formed a fairly comprehensive view of what *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is about. One can now come to the conclusion that *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is much more than a funerary text, and is, in fact, also a means to an initiation that opens the treasury to various types of consciousness. These types of consciousness are accessible to those who, like the higher lamas, are able to open the portals to such a treasury, and thereby experience the entire range of consciousness, from the lowest to the highest, or from the most basic and instinctual all the way to that sublime state which is known as the Ultimate Reality or the Absolute. It is recommended that the reader considers all the above summaries merely as a pointer to Evans-Wentz’s book, and that he or she has been sufficiently persuaded to take the trouble to read and study the original.

- 1 Walter Evans-Wentz and Lama Kazi Dawa Samdup photographed circa 1919, from the Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository.
- 2 W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1960; reprint; London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 82.
- 3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Evans-Wentz (accessed November 27, 2013.)
- 4 <http://www.tricycle.com/ancestors/the-hermit-who-owned-his-mountain-a-profile-wy-evans-wentz?page=0,0> (accessed November 27, 2013.)
- 5 Ibid. (accessed November 27, 2013.)
- 6 Ibid. (accessed November 27, 2013.)
- 7 Ibid. (accessed November 27, 2013.)
- 8 <http://socialarchive.iath.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=evans-wentz-w-y-walter-yeeling-1878-1965-cr.xml> (accessed November 27, 2013.)
- 9 <http://www.tricycle.com/ancestors/the-hermit-who-owned-his-mountain-a-profile-wy-evans-wentz?page=0,0> (accessed November 27, 2013.)
- 10 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Evans-Wentz (accessed November 27, 2013.)
- 11 W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, D.
- 12 William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, ((1952; reprint; Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1980), vi.
- 13 David Ross, *W. B. Yeats*, (New Lanark: Geddes & Grosset, 2001), 182.
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