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The Journey To The East: My Trip To India And What I Learned From It

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Written by Mr. Roddy Kenneth Street, Jr.
India Translations Headed by Rev. Dr. W. S. Vedha

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In January 1980, I was a young backpacking adventurer who traveled to India for the first time, having just finished spending two months in Nepal. I would next be spending more than 7 weeks in India, followed by another week or so in Sri Lanka. As I flew from Kathmandu, Nepal, to a landing site at Patna, India, I was full of big expectations. I was just 28 years old at that time. As a rather young world-traveler, I was not yet tired of the many months of global exploration, and I still marveled at each new and exotic culture which I encountered. I had grand hopes for my upcoming visit to India, because in my college years I had been a big fan of all the novels of the German/Swiss writer Hermann Hesse. Hermann Hesse is a German-language novelist and philosopher who was born in Germany in 1877,

who lived in India as a child, and who died in Switzerland in 1962. Hesse praised India quite highly in many of his writings.

I flew into the nation of India with my Swiss buddy Werner Baumgartner, who spoke English rather well even though his native language was German. That was good for me, since I couldn't speak any German at all! During the two months we had spent together traveling around Nepal, I had learned that Werner was also familiar with the writings of Hermann Hesse and had read some of his material in the original German-language version of the text. Werner had invited me to come to Switzerland someday to visit him, and knowing that I was a huge fan of this Swiss-German author, he had even assured me that we could travel together to see Hermann Hesse's

home at Montagnola... if I ever got enough money together for a trip to his native country.

I had immensely enjoyed traveling with Werner in Nepal... partly because of his likable personality and his cheerful attitude... and partly because he reminded me somehow of Hermann Hesse, as well as one of the many characters in Hesse's books. Werner reminded me quite a bit of *Knulp*, the lovable European vagabond who is the hero of a Hesse book which has that name for its title. While we were trekking together in Nepal, I had even drawn a portrait sketch of Werner, which I had labeled "The Happy Vagabond" because he so much reminded me of Knulp. I sensed that Werner would also be a suitable guide and travel-buddy for my first and only visit to India. When we got to Delhi, I encouraged him

to purchase a copy of Hesse's *Siddhartha*, which he read during our stay in that city.

Hesse had grown up in India, living there for years while his parents had served as German Christian missionaries to India. But rather than teaching Indians about the faith of Jesus Christ, Hermann Hesse had allowed himself to become absorbed in Eastern mysticism. He became a big admirer of many concepts found in Hinduism and Buddhism. When he went back to Europe, where he later lived in Germany and Switzerland, Hesse began teaching Westerners these mystical ideas that he learned from his years of living in India! This was rather strange behavior from a man who had briefly studied, at his father's request, in a Christian seminary. Rather than devoting himself to Jesus Christ, Hesse became preoccupied

with psychology and a study of "dualism" in human nature... especially the tension between the contemplative life and the active life. All of his future novels were devoted to characters who were seeking after enlightenment... and never quite finding it!

I had read the English translation for every one of Hesse's novels, but it was the first three books I read by him which had made the biggest impression on me: 1) *Siddhartha*, 2) *The Journey To The East*, and 3) *Rosshalde*. Both *Siddhartha* and *Rosshalde* had celebrated Eastern mysticism and the culture of India, suggesting that it was a great place to go for spiritual insights and enlightenment. *The Journey To The East* also seemed to imply that enlightenment would be found in "the East," which I took to represent both India and a future

dawning of enlightenment. I expected to find “enlightenment” during the 7 weeks I would be spending there.

In 1974, while I was still a college student in the U.S., I had already seen a wonderful movie that was made about Hesse’s novel *Siddhartha*. Conrad Rooks’ movie version of *Siddhartha* had been filmed on location in India with stars Shashi Kapoor and Simi Garewal. It had been filmed with beautiful cinematography by Sven Nykvist that had made me very eager to someday visit India. That happened in Jan. 1980, and very soon after I arrived in India, I saw in a bookstore an India-published paperback copy of Hesse’s *Siddhartha* which had on its front cover a picture of Shashi Kapoor and Simi Garewal. Naturally, I bought a copy of this paperback book to keep as a souvenir of my visit to India, and I still have that today.

So you see, I went into India with very big expectations and high hopes. I was just a young American traveler, a school librarian who dreamed of becoming an author. At that time, I was an evolutionist and a humanist, but I also liked the ideas of pantheism and Buddhism, and I thought I was already busy getting enlightened by my exotic experiences in Nepal and in India. As a child, my Christian parents had me attending a Presbyterian church service every Sunday morning, but I had left all that behind in my college years, becoming a humanist and one who was utterly devoted to a religion I will call Evolutionism.

Over the next 7 weeks, as I visited Patna, New Delhi, Agra, Varanasi, Bombay, Madras, and Rameswaram, I was shocked by many of the things that I saw in India. I saw with my own

eyes that there is massive poverty in this nation, that there are living conditions which are often unhealthy and unsanitary. I saw that disorder and confusion were everywhere; it seemed to be a society in chaos, afflicted with many misfortunes. I felt that India was more afflicted with troubles and misfortunes than any nation I had ever visited, and I felt sorry for this country, seeing its situation as quite pathetic. Where, I wondered, was the wonderful nation that Hermann Hesse had written about—the country that was a great source of spiritual insights and even enlightenment? Where was the beautiful country that I had seen photographed in the movie *Siddhartha*?

All this made me wonder why the nation of India had not been “developing” as fast as other countries seemed to be

developing. Was it somehow being left behind by the process of “evolution” which I worshiped in those days?

It seemed to me then that the nation of India should have been greatly prosperous and even a bit paradisaical because of all the spiritual insights that were afforded to its people by the religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. But I saw absolutely no evidence that the culture of India had received great blessings through the widely-proclaimed wisdom of Hinduism and Buddhism. Instead I saw conditions that seemed to me more hellishly difficult than any I had seen elsewhere in all of my travels upon the surface of the Earth.

In my college years, I had read several books that had taught me most of the concepts of Hinduism and Buddhism,

and I had especially read a lot of books about Zen Buddhism. But the unhappy reality of modern-day life in India made me start to question the validity of all these Indian teachings with which I had been indoctrinated during previous years.

Just about two months later, I arrived on the Pacific Isle of Guam, where I would be living and working for the next five years. I had not been living on Guam for more than one and one-half months when I finally became a sincere believer in Jesus Christ and the Holy Scriptures of the Christian Bible. I came to faith in Christ mostly because of Rev. Bill Pearce, and I was greatly impressed by his ministry in a late-night radio program called *Nightsounds*. I started a habit of listening to his program every night at 10 p.m., right before I would go to sleep. After a couple of weeks of listening to his words and a

strong sense that this man was bringing the voice of Jesus Christ to my ears, I one day went to the public library in Agana, Guam, and I sat down in a library carrel. On the desk in front of me I had a couple of books that I had planned to start reading, but I felt an urgent need to get right with God, so I prayed silently for forgiveness through Christ and salvation in His Holy Name, and I asked Jesus to become the Lord of my life. That was on June 16, 1980.

A couple of days later, I walked into a Christian bookstore in Agana and discovered that it was selling the Bill Pearce Bible recordings. I had earlier commented to myself, on several occasions as I listened to his radio program, that "If Jesus had spoken in English when he was in Israel 2000 years ago, I think he would have sounded a lot like this guy...!" Now I was

happily surprised to discover that Bill Pearce had recorded the entire Bible for me, in the simple English of the New International Version, on tape cassettes that I could buy for just \$5 each.

I immediately bought a few of those Bible tapes, starting with the 4 gospels that Bill Pearce had done. I was astounded by the magnificent quality of his voice work. After that, I obtained the whole New Testament that he had recorded so beautifully on cassettes. I bought a lot of his Old Testament too, while I was still living on Guam. Eventually I obtained almost all of it, a few cassettes at a time.

I've been listening to the Bill Pearce Bible recordings on an almost daily basis for the last 25 years. I eventually converted

them to MP3 files with my computer, and I still listen to them just about every day, usually for an hour or two at a time. Now I can hear them more easily than ever before with a Sony Walkman CD player, since the whole New Testament will fit on one single disk as compressed MP3 files.

After 25 years of hearing the Word of God spoken aloud by Rev. Bill Pearce, I must conclude that this gentleman is not only the main force behind my own conversion; he has continued my disciple-training for all of these 25 years through his Bible recordings. So I will have to be forever grateful to him for his electronic ministry... even though I have never actually met the man. To this very day, I have never found any other Bible reader whose voice I find so conducive to Scripture

meditation as that of Bill Pearce, and his is just about the only audio version of the Bible to which I listen with much regularity.

June 16, 1980 was the most important day in my life, the day I came to faith in Jesus Christ and asked His Holy Spirit to take control of me. I wanted Jesus to be Lord of my life, and I asked God to help me understand the Mind of Christ. After that, I started to understand the Holy Scriptures of the Bible far better than I had ever before been able to do so. When I asked Jesus Christ to be Lord of my life, I also asked that I might receive His Holy Spirit. God's Holy Spirit had come inside me at that time, and this fact made it possible for me thereafter to understand the Bible a lot better than I had previously.

In accepting Jesus and the Scriptures of the Christian Bible, I discovered that I had to reject my old concepts of Evolutionism and all that Eastern mysticism with which I was preoccupied for many years. But as I studied the Christian Bible, my eyes were opened, and I started to understand many things about India— and even about the writings of Hermann Hesse— that I had never before been able to see.

Hermann Hesse was a product of the liberal theology of the German Enlightenment period, and so he had tried to create his own unique religion by a synthesis of concepts from Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. He had been concerned primarily with a search for understanding of his own human nature, and yet in his entire lifetime he had never come to a

proper understanding of human sin and the way it will impact the search for God.

Hesse never really repented of his own sins, never turned away from the evil aspects of this world, and never devoted himself whole-heartedly to spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. Hesse was not a proper example of what a Christian should be, because he was not teaching people to accept the Truth that is Jesus Christ, and he was not telling them to be baptized in the name of Christ, nor was he teaching them that they should hear and obey the teachings of Christ. He was not willing to stop worshiping the idols and false gods that he had created for himself when he conceived his own eclectic religious system, and so he cannot be classified as a real follower of Jesus Christ... even though he was the son of two

German missionaries who came to India when he was just a child.

The characters in Hesse's novels are always seeking enlightenment... and yet none of them ever really find it. His seekers are doomed to be seekers who never find the Truth. His characters have not accepted the divine knowledge of Jesus Christ, Who said "I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life." They have never understood the Truth of Jesus Christ, or the Truth that is found in God's Holy Word— the Holy Scriptures of the Christian Bible. They have never repented of sin, and have never accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on a cross for the sins of humanity. They have never received the Light of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit of God— which is the only way a human spirit can ever be enlightened. That is the only thing

that can ever bring Light to the darkness of a human soul. That is the only thing that can ever bring a person to true enlightenment.

Hesse's characters are all lost souls who, like Hesse himself, are still needing to hear the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

During my 7 and 1/2 weeks in India, I saw a middle-aged Hindu or Buddhist gentlemen who was sitting on the ground as flies crawled over his arms, and I was amazed at the sight. There were perhaps twenty or thirty flies crawling all over his arms as he sat there, and he made absolutely no effort to shake his arms and get them off him, even though a simple movement or two could rid him of this trouble. He was not lost

in meditation or anything like that, but he would not shake his arms to get rid of the flies.

I thought about this strange sight, and realized that he acted this way because of his peculiar religious beliefs. Hinduism or Buddhism had probably taught him that he must not harm any living things, even insects, so he would not swat the flies, nor even shake his arms to be rid of the flies... nor would he interfere in any way with the "illusion" of the world that surrounds him. He had been trained for passivity instead of action, so he was not interested in productive activity. He was left powerless and afflicted because of a religious belief that did not encourage anyone to take positive actions of a sort that might transform the world for the better. He did not recognize the fact that humans are made in the image of God with a

special purpose, which is to glorify God and to praise Him eternally.

That particular citizen of India did not have any big desire to do the work necessary to get rid of those flies, even though it required of him merely that he shake his arms a few times. He seemed completely unconcerned about the possibility that he might be bitten by a disease-carrying bug. Similarly, he had no desire to clean up the garbage and trash that was lying everywhere around him. There was trash and garbage lying all along the roadside, trash in the yard of his home, and likewise trash lying around in the front yards and back yards of his neighbors' homes. The trash and garbage around him would bring rats and diseases to this area, as that is the natural way with such things. But he seemed to have no desire to get up

and start cleaning up all the trash and garbage that surrounded him.

Why did no one in India seem to be concerned about the trash and garbage that was lying all around, in so many of the places that I had visited? With so many unemployed people in India, surely there were plenty of citizens who could devote some time to cleaning up all the garbage... even if they had to volunteer and just do the job for free! I saw this trouble everywhere I went, yet outdoor trash cans were never to be seen. If I had seen some outdoor trash cans anywhere nearby while I was in India, I would have been inclined to pick up some of the trash and deposit it in the cans myself... even though I was just passing through this country— even though

I was just a young tourist who was visiting this nation for a mere 7 weeks!

It was then and there that I started to be very grateful for what we call “the Protestant Christian work ethic” that we have in the United States! As a child I had been taught that I must work hard to make the world a better place, and that “cleanliness is next to Godliness.” While visiting India, I finally started to wonder if maybe the United States had been blessed because of certain teachings of the Christian religion that (sadly) were not common knowledge in the nation of India. What we call “the Protestant work ethic” had done a lot of good for the United States.

Seeing India did a lot to shake up my one-time belief in the theory of evolution and in the religion of Evolutionism which I had been trying to propagate. It seemed to me that India was degenerating rather than evolving. In fact, I started to realize that— in a great many ways— the entire world was showing effects of degeneration rather than the upward climb of evolution!

I had seen much confusion and disorder in India— much misfortune and much affliction. I saw a lot of chaos in the society of India while I was there, even though these sights had contradicted all my good expectations for this country. That fact made me also start to wonder, at a later date, if maybe the chaos in India was only a reflection of the fact that this is a nation which worships millions of false gods, rather

than Jesus Christ, Who is Divine and the Only True Son of God. India worships millions of gods, more than any other nation on Earth... and perhaps it is not coincidental that it also has more chaos and affliction than other nations on Earth.

I think I have learned from my single trip to India an important bit of wisdom that Hermann Hesse never came to comprehend. In his novel titled *The Journey To The East*, Hesse included all the many characters of his other books, derived from different time-periods of the Earth's history, and he portrayed them as all being involved in a great pilgrimage... a symbolic trek that he called "The Journey To The East." Included in this pilgrimage were many seekers, and one of them was his character Siddhartha. Hesse suggested in this

book that the whole human race was engaged in a long journey to a New Dawn.

I have come to understand a great Truth that Hermann Hesse didn't grasp. All the seekers in this world are indeed engaged in a lengthy journey, but they travel on a path that will never bring them to enlightenment unless they first pass through the Door which is Jesus Christ. As Jesus Christ Himself has said, "No one can come to the Father God except through Me."

No one can find spiritual enlightenment unless they have come into the Light of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Light of our Universe, and He is also the great Truth of our Universe.

He is eternally the Divine Center of our Universe, and He is the Ever-Holy Son of God.

What is my purpose on this Earth? My purpose is to serve God and to glorify Him eternally, and I can do that best by helping to spread the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. I have studied the words of Jesus, and I know He desires that His followers shall teach other people about the Only Way to Heaven. The Only Way to Heaven and the Realm of God Almighty is through the Door which is Jesus Christ.

The human race is indeed on a great pilgrimage, what Hesse visualized as a "Journey To The East." But it is Jesus Christ Who is the goal of that pilgrimage! He is the destination toward which each human being is directed during earthly

days, and at the end of every earthly lifetime will be an encounter with God The Son. Then Jesus will either accept that individual as His follower or deny that He ever knew that person. It is appointed for a person once to die, and after that comes the Judgment of God. If a person has not kept the laws of God and does not know Jesus, that person will be consigned to "the Second Death," which is an eternity in Hell... and they will never see the glory of Christ's Heaven.

But Jesus is also the goal of humanity's Earthly history as well. God The Son came to the Earth two thousand years ago in the body of Jesus Christ, but He will come again before long at the conclusion of the Last Days. The Old Earth will then be destroyed with fire and a New Earth will be created. The surviving population for the New Earth will be seen to be those

Christians who are True Believers and who are thoroughly devoted to Jesus Christ, those who have trusted in Him for salvation from their sins. They will see a New Dawn as Jesus rescues the remnant who are His followers and brings them into the glory of His presence on a New Earth.

The Holy Bible tells us in Malachi that Jesus Christ is “the Sun of Righteousness who will rise with healing in its wings.” Jesus has declared that He is “the Light of the World,” and this will be conspicuously true on that day in the future when He returns to this Earth. The sky will be completely dark at that time, without even the presence of a Moon or stars.

When Jesus Christ begins to descend from that dark sky in the brilliant form of His Resurrection Body, His powerful light

will be dazzling to behold, and will be seen by all human eyes everywhere upon our planet. As He descends again to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, His brilliant light will make Him appear like a New Sun that is coming down to sit upon the surface of the Earth.

Jesus will bring with Him then the glory of a New Earth and the Heavenly City which is the New Jerusalem. He will be like a New Sun for the Earth. The Old Earth will be gone. The New Earth will honor His Holy Name and will acknowledge His Lordship over all.

The goal of humanity’s “Journey to the East” will then be revealed at last. Everyone who is left on Earth will then bow before Him, knowing that Jesus Christ is Divine and is Lord

over all. Everyone will see that He and the Father God are One... knowing that God The Son is part of a Divine Trinity which includes also God The Father and God The Spirit.

He is the New Dawn which awaits humanity at the end of its "Journey to the East." Jesus is "the Sun of Righteousness" who brings salvation to humanity and offers us the hope of a New Dawn!

You can live to see that New Dawn if you will turn away from sin and accept the Truth of salvation in Jesus Christ.

You gain Eternal Life with God by placing Jesus Christ, **Who in the Trinity of God created our Universe**, upon a throne at

the center of your heart! *He deserves that position and that kind of respect.* He was first **God The Son**, but when born in human flesh He became the only sinless and righteous person who ever lived. Yet He sacrificed Himself on a cross for your sake, taking all guilt and sins upon Himself— for you and for me, and for all people everywhere on Earth— **that whoever wishes for salvation might be rescued from the due punishment of sins.**

If you will do this, you will gain a new contentment and peace as you accept God's organizational plan for the Universe. . . because you'll be letting God be the Ruler of All Things in this world. . . and in your own life.

All it really takes is a simple but sincere little prayer—one that you should make up in your own words. The prayer for deliverance and for God's leadership should come from your own heart!

Some important elements that you might include are:

- 1) your desire to turn away from the wrongness or evil of your past life, and your remorse over the sins of your previous life,
- 2) your desire for God's forgiveness and mercy through the act of sacrifice of His Only Begotten Son (Jesus Christ),
- 3) your desire to know God's leadership in your life,
- 4) your desire to learn more of God's truth through Bible study,
- 5) your desire to find fellowship with genuine believers.

When you're saved, you'll know Jesus is King of the Universe and the Lord of your life. You'll know the three faces

of God Almighty: God The Father, God The Son, and God The Spirit. His Holy Light will start to be visible in your own face and actions!

Jesus said of the people of God that "The kingdom of heaven is like a **net** that God has cast into the sea, and it gathers of every kind: When it is full, it will be pulled up on the shore, where they will sit down to sort the catch, and they will **collect the good fish in baskets, but the bad things will be thrown away. This is the way it will be at the end of the world:** The angels shall come forth, and they will **separate** the unrighteous persons from among those justified by God..."

Excerpt from the Book of Matthew, who was a constant companion of Jesus and his devoted disciple [13:47-50].

Jesus spoke of the people of God as being like a seed that is growing secretly, saying, "As for the kingdom of God, it is as if a person should cast seed into the ground; and then he sleeps, and he rises up night and day to see that the seed is springing forth and always growing up, although he knows not exactly how. The Earth is bringing forth fruit from itself; first the blade, then the ears of corn, and after that the fullness of the ears of corn. And when all the **fruit of the Earth** has come forth, immediately God will use the sickle to reap the fields, because the **harvest-time** has come."

Excerpt from the book of Mark [4:26-29].

It's also important for all of us to remember this:

- 1) **WE SPEAK TO GOD** by our prayers.
- 2) **GOD SPEAKS TO US** by the words of Holy Scripture.

So we must try to read His words and His Book just as often as we possibly can!!

God wants to bless you for all your long efforts to understand this very confusing and difficult Universe in which we live— so let Him reward your search with the grace of His forgiveness and enlightenment!

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Mr. R. K. Street invites you to send letters (English only) to him through
e-mail: etracts@yahoo.com or eztraveller@netscape.net
or earthtrek1@hotmail.com

Contact Dr. Vedha in India - phone 04259-280488 or cell ph. 98421-92755
e-mail: vedhabethel@yahoo.co.in or vedhacmf@rediffmail.com

God is continuously harvesting the Earth... as His long-range plan for the Earth's transformation goes ever forward...!