Hermann Hesse and Vedanta Philosophy: A Discussion of the Correlation Between the Basic Themes in the Later Novels of Hermann Hesse and the Traditional Philosophy of India

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HERMANN HESSE AND VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY
A Discussion of the Correlation Between the Basic Themes
in the Later Novels of Hermann Hesse
and the Traditional Philosophy of India

BY

James Edgar Carnahan

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HERMANN HESSE AND VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY

A Discussion of the Correlation Between the Basic Theme:
in the Later Novels of Hermann Hesse
and the Traditional Philosophy of India

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Charleston, Illinois

April 1974
In much of Western literature there is a recurrent theme. This is the aspect of the search for meaning, for reality, for truth. Much of our philosophy is simply a grasping for meaning beyond the apparent chaos of life. In Hermann Hesse's writings, this search is the fundamental theme, one which dominates all his work. "I had no less a task than to carry through to the end my scrutiny of chaos, with the now soaring, now sinking hope of rediscovery beyond chaos nature and innocence."\(^1\) Hesse's search is for the true self, that which lies within and which is hidden by our bodies and minds. Hesse was an untiring seeker after this elusive self, or soul, all his life. His writings are an accurate reflection of his internal journey towards himself. In the viewpoint of traditional Indian thought or philosophy, Hesse's search is readily understandable. In India, there is a time-honored tradition of the aspiring seeker who dedicates himself or herself to the long hunt for the self, that within us which is eternal and unchanging.

Hesse's characters have a great affinity with the seekers of the East. Theirs is a similar journey, a series of parallel paths all leading to that one goal--the self. Often using the terminology of the East, Hesse's characters struggle, mostly unsuccessfully or only partially successfully, through the pain and hardship of a life which, along with the Buddha, Hesse felt was full of suffering. In traditional Indian philosophy, based upon

\(^1\) Hermann Hesse, *Autobiographical Writings*, p. 53.
the Vedas, earthly life is always a struggle—not for survival but for truth, for something which lies hidden by the veil of Maya (the world perceived with the senses). I believe that much light can be shed upon the major characters and themes of Hesse through the concepts and discoveries of India's spiritual men, past and present.

Hesse's Connection with India

Hermann Hesse was the child of missionaries. His mother was born in India and his family was familiar with Indian philosophy. With this background and his familiarity with the Vedas, Upanishads, and other Indian scriptures, it is not surprising that many of the concepts of Vedic thought would find themselves in Hesse's books. However, it is not perhaps through the careful study of the scriptures and philosophy of the East that Hesse's affinity for India can be traced. Instead it is from a natural similarity of spirit with the individual seeker that parallels can be discovered in Hesse's writings, writings which reveal the inmost thoughts and dreams of the man himself. His characters were all aspects of Hermann Hesse. "Hesse's writing is self-portrayal and self-analysis, a continuous and watchful debate with himself; it is a poetical and humane self-confession that has few equals in twentieth-century literature."² In his own words, "Almost every book I have written has been a spiritual autobiography."³

Jungian Analysis

For this thesis I have used those books which were written after Hermann Hesse began Jungian analysis in 1916. The books that follow, Demian, Klingsor's

³ Ibid., p. 115.
Last Summer, Siddhartha, Narcissus and Goldmund, Journey to the East, and Magister Ludi, show the influence of Jung's interest in the spirituality of the East. Hesse's acquaintance with C.G. Jung and his sessions with Josef Lang, a Jung disciple, perhaps heightened his own feeling for the search for the self which has been India's constant goal. At any rate, it is from this period that Hesse's novels take on more relationship to the ancient philosophies of the East. Jung had studied the spiritual practices of India extensively and had incorporated its philosophies into his form of psycho-analysis. In regards to this period of analysis, Hesse wrote, "Whoever with proper seriousness has gone a little way along the path of analysis in search of spiritual first causes from among his memories, dreams, and associations, reaps the lasting profit that might be called the possession of the 'inner relationship to the subconscious'." With this in mind, it is always well to note that Hesse paid strict heed to his intuitive feelings, his inner voices. This is the basis of his work and also another similarity between Hesse and the East. The Indian seeker in the traditional sense is one who listens to his inner voice. He is one who tries to sift through and weed out the nonessentials and the impermanent in order to find that which is real, lasting, and unchangeable. Because of the vast misconceptions of the average Westerner regarding the philosophy of India's spiritual men, I would like to include a brief section which touches upon some of the basic concepts and tenets of Vedanta philosophy.

4 Bernhard Zeller, Portrait of Hesse, pp. 84-85.
Vedanta Philosophy

The core of Vedanta philosophy and the theme of Hesse's writing are the same: the soul, the self, which is neither the body nor the mind. His books lead one directly into a study of those who have developed the search for the inner self into both a science and an art. Vedanta philosophy is based upon the Vedas, a body of work considered to be the oldest written scriptures. The Vedas are the source of Indian culture and spirituality, although their inner meaning is now generally overlooked or misunderstood by layman and scholar alike. The central point of the Vedas is simple and explicit; that is, that Brahman, God, is meant to be realized by each and every individual soul. The large body of work known as the Vedas is a systematic explanation of the process of realization of Brahman, the absolute.

In this paper I will be referring to the term "Vedanta" in its broadest sense. The teachings of Vedanta are considered by the orthodox to be eternal truths discovered by ancient sages who were in direct communion with God. They were transmitted orally from teacher to disciple until sometime within the last three thousand to four thousand years when they were written down. The basis of the teachings of Vedanta is a practical one. Only direct experience is of any value to the true Hindu seeker. The words of books are only tools to give one inspiration and direction. The concepts embodied in the Hindu tradition are those which claim verification by sages and spiritual masters from the ancient past through Krishna and Buddha and on up to the present day. "Vedanta is the philosophy of the Vedas, those Indian scriptures which are the most ancient religious writings now known to the world. More generally speaking, the term 'Vedanta' covers not only the Vedas themselves but the whole body of literature which explains,
elaborates and comments upon their teaching, right down to the present day."^5
I shall use the term interchangeably with Indian philosophy or "Hinduism", for Vedanta is the philosophy of India. It is the basis of all sects and beliefs. Every aspect of Indian life is permeated with Vedanta.

Vedanta declares that there is a consciousness, a universal being, Brahman, within which all the cosmos exists. The ultimate nature of this Brahman, or God, is impersonal, absolute. Brahman is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. He is at once impersonal and personal and is totally beyond description. All things are Brahman, but Brahman cannot be defined by any thing. He is the unity who became multiplicity, the One who became many. According to Vedanta, all beings, conscious and unconscious, animate and inanimate, are within Brahman. All of Indian philosophy is concerned not only with attaining knowledge of Brahman but with attaining complete absorption and oneness with Brahman. All those who have been considered to be saints are said to have realized God. These God-realized men and women have said that within each person there exists, in seed-state, the potential God. This is the soul, or Atman. "There is a Spirit which is pure and which is beyond all age and death; and beyond hunger and thirst and sorrow. This is Atman, the Spirit in man. All the desires of this Spirit are Truth. It is this Spirit that we must find and know: man must find his own Soul. He who has found and knows his Soul has found all the worlds, has achieved all his desires."^6

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^5 Christopher Isherwood (ed.), Vedanta for the Western World, p. 1.
^6 Juan Mascaro (trans.), The Upanishads, p. 121.
the acceptance of physical form. In essence, the soul is lost and the process of discovering it is the evolutionary journey which is taken by every being. When one discovers the soul and grows into conscious oneness with the soul, illumination takes place and Brahman is known.

According to Vedanta, the soul begins in the mineral stage, then through countless centuries gradually evolves into the plant, then the animal, and then the human stage where consciousness first awakens. In the human phase there is a constant evolution through various incarnations until one becomes aware of the nature of one's journey. Then begins the difficult process of growing into the divine being, the next cycle of evolution. Purification of the body, mind, and heart is essential in order to realize the soul, the Atman, the inner self. It can take many, many lifetimes to attain the realization of the self. This realization, which is direct experience of God, takes place in the relatively early stages of the seeker's journey for, after realization, one must grow into the very essence of divinity. It is an ongoing process, one which constantly evolves. God is not a static being but is constantly evolving, as is His creation. There is no end.

The teachings of different realized men vary according to their own realizations. Since Brahman is infinite, there are many ways to realize Him. Also there are many stages of realizations, many steps in the ladder. So within the basic framework of Vedanta there are many interpretations, many views, many paths which all lead to the one goal. But, in essence, there are no truly important differences among the great souls, only individual interpretations of the same basic theme of going within to realize the ultimate truth. This is why Indian thought accepts all the major religions as being so many jewels on a single necklace. Indian spirituality accepts
Christ as readily as Krishna. Both are considered to be direct incarnations of God—men who have realized Brahman in previous lifetimes and who return to earth for the sole purpose of helping others to the goal. These enlightened beings are called Avatars. Like Brahman, the Avatar is, in his transcendental state, unfathomable to the ordinary person. However, by accepting the bondage of human form he identifies with humanity on one level while always remaining in communion with the absolute on another level.

Below the level of the Avatar is the yogi, one who has achieved realization only recently, perhaps in this lifetime or very recent lifetimes. The word "yoga" means union with the Absolute, with Brahman. The paths of yoga are many, but generally there are three major yogas: Jnana (knowledge), Karma (service), and Bhakti (love). The hatha yoga known so well now in the West is considered to be only of very minor importance in the world of spirituality. While all paths lead to God, the path of Bhakti, the heart, is considered the fastest. It was the path of Krishna, Christ, Ramakrishna, and Chaitanya, all undisputed Avatars according to most sources. "When we enter into the spiritual life, we discover that there are two significant roads that can lead us toward our destined Goal. One road is the mental road, the road of the mind; the other is the psychic road, the road of the heart. Now both of these roads can take us to our destined Goal. But one road leads us to our Goal more quickly and more safely, and that is the road of the heart.... Eventually they do reach the same destination. But those who follow the path of the heart become convinced, on their way to self-discovery, that love itself is the supreme Knowledge. Right now, to us, knowledge and love are two different things. The mind supplies us with
knowledge and the heart supplies us with love. But the deeper we go, the clearer it becomes to us that love and knowledge are one and the same thing.\textsuperscript{7} Karma yoga, the path of service, can be considered to fall in either category. One can dedicate one's work to God out of the knowledge that this will help in one's path or one can dedicate service out of love for God.

The concept of the spiritual master, or guru, is one which is very often misunderstood by the Western mind. The guru is thought by Vedanta to be almost indispensable for one who wishes to realize God. This concept will figure importantly in some of Hesse's books, although it is one which Hesse, like most Western men, did not fully accept and most likely did not understand. The reverence of a disciple for his guru takes on many aspects, but generally the disciple worships his guru as God. This is not to say he worships the human body and mind of the guru as God. Instead he worships the inner light, the divinity, within the spiritual master--that part of the master which is in the state of union with the Absolute. This inner being or consciousness of the master is the same Atman which dwells within the disciple but in the case of the master it is no longer a seed but has flowered into full bloom. The master is one with the inner being of the disciple and can lead him to his own self. "The Guru who is the embodiment of that which is indicated by the terms sat, chit, and ananda (existence, consciousness and bliss), prevents the disciple who, on account of his acceptance of the forms of the objects of the senses, has swerved from his true state and is consequently distressed and buffeted by joys and sorrows, from continuing

so and establishes him in his own real nature without differentiation." The disciple's reverence for and obedience to the guru is truly reverence for and obedience to the self, the universal self which is within all.

The method used by the most advanced spiritual teachers is completely alien to the Western mind. The guru does not actually teach, per se. While any number of methods may be employed at any given time, the basic job of the guru is to actually transform his disciples from within. While a teacher of lesser spiritual height gives to his disciples one certain formula which is simply the formula that has worked for him, the greatest masters are supposed to have the capacity to go within their disciples and open up their divinity in an individual way. Each soul is thought to have a certain individuality within, a certain personal way of reaching the ultimate. The master's job is subtle and delicate. His job is to show the individual where the key to his realization lies.

Hesse's Universal Mother in Relation to the Hindu Worship of Mother Kali

The concept of the Earth Mother or feminine aspect of God is one that looms large in Hesse's writing. "He found refuge in the maternal principle as the expression of permanence and eternal rebirth. The eternal mother was a symbol that fascinated him and that came to the fore in many of his poems. But he also found that it is a symbol that needs its opposite, the principle's representation of nature." "

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8 Samuel Bercholz and Michael Fagan (eds.), The Spiritual Teaching of Ramana Maharshi, p. 17.
9 Bernhard Zeller, Portrait of Hesse, p. 156.
In Narcissus and Goldmund, this image is particularly important. Hesse splits the cosmos into two halves—the male and female, or the Father and Mother. The Father, represented by Narcissus, is pictured as reason, logic, the path of asceticism, and the mind. Narcissus leads Goldmund to the discovery that it is his destiny to worship the Mother, to live in the world of love, not in Narcissus' world. Narcissus pushes Goldmund toward his self, toward realization of his inner being. He says to Goldmund, "I wish nothing more than to see you become Goldmund through and through." To realize his essence, it is necessary for Goldmund to immerse himself in the world of the mother which Hesse pictures as the world of the senses, of love, the world of dreams. It is also the world of death and suffering. In his acceptance of, and surrender to, the world of the mother and everything which belongs to this world, Goldmund touches upon the worship of God as mother. He is willing to accept his own painful death because he feels his universal mother is calling him back to her, the source.

In Demian, the image of the mother again is an important theme. Frau Eva represents the all-embracing love of the Divine Mother as well as a woman. Her image leads Sinclair towards knowledge of the self. "My love for Frau Eva seemed to fill my whole life. But ever day it manifested itself differently. Sometimes I felt certain that it was not she as a person whom I was attracted to and yearned for with all my inner being, but that she existed only as a metaphor of my inner self, a metaphor whose sole purpose was to lead me more deeply into myself." She symbolizes the aspect of

10 Hermann Hesse, Narcissus and Goldmund, p. 41.
11 Hermann Hesse, Demian, p. 127.
God the Mother.

The sensual aspect of Sinclair's love is interwoven with dreams of cosmic union. "I had dreams, too, in which my union with her was consummated in new symbolic acts. She was an ocean into which I streamed. She was a star and I another on my way to her." Sinclair saw Frau Eva as mother, master, goddess, and as something which lay deep within himself.

The similarities between Hesse's mother-images and the Indian concept of Mother Kali are striking. The orthodox Hindu worships God in many ways but the aspect of God the Mother is an especially powerful one. Vedanta philosophy states that in the final realization there is only Brahman, that there is no duality, but a nameless, formless existence which transcends all attempts at definition. It is the return to this Brahman, from which we all came, that is the only, and inevitable, goal of life. Everything is, in the final analysis, one. But Brahman is static in this state. That which has created the universe is Sakti, the feminine aspect, worshipped as Mother Kali. Kali is the power which is housed by Brahman. (Brahman is always referred to as masculine.) "Brahman and Kali, the Godhead and Its potency, are inseparable, like fire and its power to burn, like a gem and its lustre, like a word and its meaning. All creatures--gods and angels, prophets and saints, the worldly and the wicked--are manifestations or offspring of Her. She resembles an earthly mother in that created beings come out of Her, and after they are born are preserved by Her. At the time of final liberation, they enter Brahman through the portal of Her grace." 13

12 Hermann Hesse, Demian, p. 128.

13 Swami Nikhilananda, Holy Mother, p. 81.
In *Demian* there is much emphasis on the symbol of Godhead known as Abraxas, which is visualized as the God of good and evil, that which is both creative and destructive. Demian had told Sinclair that to worship only the so-called good or positive elements of God was not enough. Any whole image of Godhead would have to include the dark side, the part which everyone knows of as evil, destructive, the role given to the Devil in Christianity. This is an apt description of the Indian's Mother Kali, who is portrayed most as a goddess with four arms. With her right hands she is blessing her devotees, while one left hand holds a decapitated head and the other holds a bloody sword. Around her neck there is usually a garland of skulls. "So Kali is shown as the Mother and the Destroyer, giver of life and death, blessings and misfortunes, pleasures and pains. To her devotees, the fortunes and misfortunes of life are simply to be regarded as 'Mother's play'."  

Those Indians who attempt to reach the absolute through worship of Kali are fulfilling Demian's exhortation to "consider everything sacred, the entire world, not merely this artificially separated half! Thus alongside the divine service we should also have a service for the devil."

Suicide as Related to the Concept of Surrender

Harry Haller, in his determination to one day commit suicide, desires to return to the primeval mother, the source. According to Indian philosophy, "...it is a great opportunity and privilege--attainable only after many rebirths into lower forms of life--to obtain birth in a human body. For it

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14 Christopher Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, p. 51.
is only during a lifetime in a human body that the goal of all life can be reached: unitive knowledge of Brahman. Therefore, to discard your body willfully is to frustrate your own spiritual development. Such an act may have terrible consequences. It may even cause your rebirth in some lower life-form or condemn you to a long period in some kind of purgatory or limbo.\textsuperscript{16}

The purpose of Haller's contemplation of suicide is, in fact, the goal of spirituality, the dream of liberating oneself by "going back to the mother, back to God, back to the all."\textsuperscript{17} The method may seem to be the antithesis of the orthodox Indian way, but the goal is the same--to extinguish the ego and return to the mother. Here, Hesse seems to have a different interpretation of the cosmic laws than would the Hindu. However, in the same paragraph, which is within the Treatise on the Steppenwolf, he says about suicides: "They are ready to cast themselves away in surrender, to be extinguished and to go back to the beginning."\textsuperscript{18} For Hesse, suicide represents the surrender of the ego. He uses suicide as a symbol of ego death. Hesse's idea of suicide is that it should not be the act of a desperate person in a state of panic. Instead it is a form of surrender to the infinite, and it is only to be done with this realization. This relates to the fact that many yogis have given up their bodies voluntarily. Technically this is suicide, but actually once the yogi has realized God, he is no longer under any compunction to remain in the body. "But, once Brahman is known, the body has served its

\textsuperscript{16} Christopher Isherwood, Ramakrishna and His Disciples, p. 122.

\textsuperscript{17} Hermann Hesse, Steppenwolf, p. 55.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 55.
purpose. Therefore, if a knower of Brahman...decides to discard it, his act will not be regarded as suicide in the culpable sense. 19

In Klein and Wagner, there is an actual suicide committed by Klein. As he drowns himself, he has the same experience of realization or oneness as did Siddhartha. While Siddhartha had surrendered to life, Klein surrendered to death, but both extinguished their smaller selves in the larger self. The crucial point is not the means of surrender, but the surrender itself. For Klein, surrender is a reasonably simple matter. He is able to experience the transcendental vision of union by simply giving himself up to the experience of drowning. "And whoever had once surrendered himself, one single time, whoever had practiced the great act of confidence and entrusted himself to fate, was liberated." 20

Surrender is a theme that is very complex, both in the literature of Hesse and in the philosophy of Vedanta. A close scrutiny of this elusive term shows much interrelationship. In general, both in the West and probably for the average Eastern man, the word surrender has connotations of weakness. The dictionary describes it as "give up; relinquish.--v.i. give oneself up; yield--n. a yielding." 21

Surrender to God is liberation, enlightenment. In order to be able to surrender one's entire being to the Absolute, the seeker has to completely purify and transform his being. This is supposed to be the work of not only one lifetime but perhaps several, for the act of surrender is not

19 Christopher Isherwood, Ramakrishna and His Disciples, p. 122.
20 Hermann Hesse, Klingsor's Last Summer, p. 138.
21 Albert and Loy Morehead (eds.), Webster Handy College Dictionary, p. 452.
possible for the ordinary man who is full of desires, doubts, confusion, etc. It is something that can be done only by one who has gone beyond the illusion of the senses, one who has made contact with the inner self and knows that there is only God. "Through many a long life his discrimination ripens: He makes me his refuge, knows that Brahman is all. How rare are such great ones!"22 The surrender of the seeker to God is, in reality, the surrender of one's lower nature to one's higher nature, which is one with Brahman. There is no way to reach the highest goal of life without surrender. "And when we really want to enlarge our existence, expand our consciousness and be one, inseparably one, with the Vast, then surrender is the only answer."23

Siddhartha's realization is one which has been reached after much suffering and labor. He surrendered to the experience of the river and attained the state of oneness claimed as life's goal by India's saints. "From that hour Siddhartha ceased to fight against this destiny. There shone in his face the serenity of knowledge, of one who is no longer confronted with conflict of desires, who has found salvation, who is in harmony with the stream of events, with the stream of life, full of sympathy and compassion, surrendering himself to the stream, belonging to the Unity of all things."24

Fire and Water Symbolism

It is important to note the importance of water in the experiences of both Siddhartha and Klein. Water is an important symbol to Hesse. Goldmund

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23 Sri Chinmoy, My Rose Petals, p. 71.
24 Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha, p. 136.
lay for a long time in the water after being thrown from his horse. Demian sometimes dreamt of Frau Eva as a body of water which he was entering. India has always cherished water as a symbol of God, or purity. The Ganges is considered by many to cleanse one's whole being just by bathing in it. In much of Indian literature there are references to the individual soul as a drop of water from the ocean, or God. The orthodox Hindu bathes quite often, not only to remain clean physically but to help purify the soul. A body of water symbolizes union with the absolute. This symbol of water is very explicit in Hesse. "When Siddhartha listened attentively to this river, to this song of a thousand voices; when he did not listen to the sorrow or laughter, when he did not bind his soul to any one particular voice and absorb it in his Self, but heard them all, the whole, the unity, then the great song of a thousand voices consisted of one word: Om--perfection." 25

For the Hindu, fire is a purifying force. The ancient fire-sacrifices symbolized the fire that burns within, the fire of longing for the infinite. In the Katha Upanishad, Yama, the God of Death, says, "That fire which is the means of attaining the infinite worlds, and is also their foundation, is hidden in the sacred place of the heart." 26 This inner flame purifies the inner being. Similarly the orthodox Hindu has always cremated the dead in order to purify the outer body. Traditionally, many seekers in India have considered fire to be sacred and have meditated on it. Hesse also carried on this tradition "for his favorite pastime was making an earth fire, feeding it, dreaming and meditating in front of the smoldering embers. He

26 Juan Mascaro, The Upanishads, p. 56.
saw fire as a sign of the return of all things to unity, of purification and refinement." 27 In Demian, Sinclair and Pistorius meditate before a fire. "I stared fixedly into the flames, lost myself in dreams and stillness, recognized figures in the smoke and pictures in the ashes." 28 In Narcissus and Goldmund, Goldmund burns the hut where his lover had died of the plague as an act of purification.

Jnana/Bhakti--Knowledge/Love

In Narcissus and Goldmund, there is an elaboration of two different paths, or methods, of attaining realization of the true self: reason and feeling. Narcissus is a Jnana yogi, one who follows the path of knowledge. This method is for those with an intellectual nature. Jnana is the path of discrimination. For this type of seeker, ideas are of major importance; reflection upon the nature of the unreal and the real leads him to eventual illumination. Narcissus attempts to reach God, the reality, through denying the material world, by stripping off the layers of ignorance which cover the true self. This piercing of the veil of illusion is done with reason, with severe acts of will power and thought. "Our thinking is a constant process of converting things to abstractions, a looking away from the sensory, an attempt to construct a purely spiritual world." 29 This is his path, his destiny in life, and he accepts it. Yet he realizes that his method is not the only one and that it is perhaps not even the best. Jnana yoga is a long

27 Bernhard Zeller, Portrait of Hesse, p. 159.
28 Hermann Hesse, Demian, p. 86.
29 Hermann Hesse, Narcissus and Goldmund, p. 290.
and difficult path. Narcissus tells Goldmund, "You live fully; you were endowed with the strength of love, the ability to feel. Whereas we creatures of reason, we don't live fully; we live in an arid land, even though we often seem to guide and rule you." 30

Narcissus, towards the end of the book, has developed serious doubts about the path he treads. Goldmund's last words profoundly shook him to the depths of his existence: "But how will you die when your time comes, Narcissus, since you have no mother? Without a mother, one cannot love. Without a mother, one cannot die." 31 Narcissus is reaching the point reached by the youthful Siddhartha when he left home after realizing that intellectual knowledge was not helping him in his search for the self, the Atman. The path of Jnana is the most difficult and dangerous of the three major yogas (Bhakti, Karma, and Jnana). In reality, the Hindu seeker does not adhere strictly to one narrow path. Any major spiritual journey involves all three, but there will be more emphasis on one. Of all the ways of attaining illumination or God, love is thought by most of the great teachers to be the most practical.

In the Bhagavad-Gita, one of India's most revered books, Sri Krishna elaborates for his disciple the two main paths: the loving worship of a personal aspect of God (such as Krishna, the Mother Kali, Christ, etc.) or worship of the impersonal. "Those whose minds are fixed on me in steadfast love, worshipping me with absolute faith. I consider them to have the greater understanding of yoga. As for those others, the devotees of God the

30 Hermann Hesse, Narcissus and Goldmund, p. 43.
31 Ibid., p. 311.
unmanifest, indefinable and changeless, they worship that which is omnipresent, constant, eternal, beyond thought's compass, never to be moved. They hold all the senses in check. They are tranquil-minded, and devoted to the welfare of humanity. They see the Atman in every creature. They also will certainly come to me. But the devotees of the unmanifest have a harder task, because the unmanifest is very difficult for embodied souls to realize."

In some way or another, many have agreed that "God is love." Chaitanya and Ramakrishna, both considered to be Avatars, lived in a perceptual sea of love. Chaitanya constantly cried and chanted God's name and Ramakrishna went into samadhi, a transcendental state of communion with the Absolute, whenever he heard God's name. Siddhartha, after attaining peace and illumination, says, "It seems to me, Govinda, that love is the most important thing in the world. It may be important to great thinkers to examine the world, to explain and despise it. But I think it is only important to love the world, not to despise it, not for us to hate each other, but to be able to regard the world and ourselves and all beings with love, admiration, and respect." The orthodox Hindu would only have added that it is necessary to love that which is within the world, within ourselves and all beings, God. The yogi loves all things because in all things he sees one thing alone and that is Brahman.

For the Vedantist, love is, ideally, not related at all with the senses or the physical. It is not love as we know it at all. "From the spiritual

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33 Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha, p. 147.
and inner point of view, love is self-expansion. Human love binds and is bound. Divine Love expands and enlarges itself. If we love with a view to achieving something from others, then our love is no love. Love means constant self-offering on the strength of our own inner aspiration.34 Narcissus tells Goldmund, "You don't look away from the world; you give yourself to it, and by your sacrifice to it raise it to the highest, a parable of eternity. We thinkers try to come closer to God by pulling the mask of the world away from His face. You come closer to Him by loving His creation and re-creating it."35 Here Hesse seems to be putting into perspective two different and opposite philosophies of the Hindu culture. In the philosophy of discrimination or Jnana, one tries to reach Brahman by controlling the thoughts and chipping away at the layers of ignorance. The followers of this path conceive of God only in the absolute state, without attributes. Narcissus sees God as an abstraction, an idea. "Liberation, as we have already seen, can be reached without devotion to God. But this is a subtle and dangerous path, threading its way through the pitfalls of ambition and pride."36 This is an apt description of Narcissus, whose rigid self-control hides his intellectual arrogance.

The easier and more fulfilling way to realize the absolute, according to many spiritual authorities, is through love, devotion, and surrender. Narcissus echoes this many times as he points out to Goldmund that for one who loves the way is made easier, even though he knows that he, himself, is

34 Sri Chinmoy, My Rose Petals, p. 68.
35 Hermann Hesse, Narcissus and Goldmund, pp. 290-291.
36 Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, How to Know God, p. 53.
not capable of this. In surrendering his life to the will of the mother, Goldmund gives up all attempts at knowledge. He rejects the asceticism and the intellectualism of Narcissus. Instead he throws himself into the hands of the mother, whom he sees as his God. He worships the mother in much the same manner as the devotee worships his personal form of God, whether Kali, Ishwara, or Jehovah. Of course, Goldmund is not a completely conscious seeker after the absolute, as is Narcissus. Instead he seeks his own destiny, whatever it may be. He is not a thinker; he is one who throws himself into the sensual world, the world of desire. Hesse's central characters often must experience the coarsest and most debasing experiences in order to find some clue to the meaning of life. This, of course, is a Western concept and Hesse always remained a Western man, regardless of the undeniable strain of the Eastern ascetic running through him. So we have Narcissus and Goldmund, two parts of a whole, which, when unified, make up the character which Hesse always dealt with—a man who is pulled between two extremes in his search for unity. Here he has split this character in half to create the two separate aspects.

The traditional Hindu aspirant who follows the path of Bhakti, who worships the image of a personal God, does not go through the experiences of the sensual life in order to find the self. Neither does one who practices discrimination. Buddha's concept of the middle way is one that has always been a tradition with the most exalted figures of India's spiritual history. Buddha, like Siddhartha, attempted extreme asceticism and found it wanting. But, unlike Siddhartha, the Buddha felt that the path of desire was very obviously one that would only lower the consciousness. He felt no need to experience it himself.
Perhaps the best explanation for the difference between one who must experience the lower desires and one who doesn't need the experience would be in the Hindu concept of reincarnation. This would possibly point out that in the cases of Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, and even in much lower calibre saints, the experiences of the lower nature had already been fulfilled in previous lives. By the time one had reached the lifetime in which realization was to take place, the soul was already advanced beyond the point where it would succumb to lower desires. Its only desire would be for the ultimate experience.

Hesse often refers to the theory of reincarnation. Some of his characters assume its veracity. Others don't. But Hesse was certainly at home with the tenets of reincarnation.

As he is drowning, Klein knows that he will return again in another body. But Goldmund feels that he will not return, that death is the end, that he will return permanently to the Mother. The Hindu would have to say here that Goldmund had a long way to go, many more lives to live, before he would reach that state. He would point out that Goldmund would have to return to earth in physical forms until he had purified his nature. Then, only, could he have a conscious union with the Mother.

The realizations which are attained by some of Hesse's characters are always only partial ones in terms of Vedanta philosophy. Siddhartha, his most highly evolved figure in the sense of personal awareness, comes closest to the goal which has been claimed by and for the great saints or spiritual masters. But the goal of the yogi is not only to see or know Brahman, the Absolute, but to be Brahman--to be so completely absorbed in Light that one is only Light. When Govinda is able to observe within Siddhartha all the
forms of life, when he sees that Siddhartha is as radiant as the Buddha, then we know that Siddhartha has not only realized the Goal but is becoming the Goal. He has not only seen; he has become. The realized being is said to be beyond the laws of Karma, beyond time and space, beyond the understanding of those of us who are not realized. It would hardly be possible, then, for Hesse to be able to portray completely a protagonist of this nature. He, himself, was still struggling with all the desires, doubts, fears, and destructive tendencies that the Vedantist says is the lot of those who are beginning to get a glimpse of the light at the end of the tunnel. Naturally his characters are, with the exception of Siddhartha, all at various stages, mostly in the painful, very early stages of fighting to get a glimpse of the pinpoint of light in the distance. Harry Haller, the Steppenwolf, after his experiences in the Magic Theater, knew that there was a long way to go. "I knew that all the hundred thousand pieces of life's game were in my pocket. A glimpse of its meaning had stirred my reason and I was determined to begin the game afresh. I would sample its tortures once more and shudder again at its senselessness. I would traverse not once more, but often, the hell of my inner being."37

In Hesse's work there is always a sense of progress, of a generally painful but, nonetheless, tireless pushing forward towards new growth, new insights. This progress is always toward the interior of being, toward the inner self.

37 Hermann Hesse, Steppenwolf, p. 248.
In Hindu philosophy, the ideal of "selfless service" is very important. Within the field of Karma yoga, the yoga of action, we find the antithesis of the stereotyped ascetic, dwelling in a cave, completely withdrawn from the world. In the Bhagavad-Gita, Sri Krishna, approximately five thousand years ago, explained to his disciple, Arjuna, that action does not bind the soul to the material world. In his philosophy, action (work done selflessly) is yoga. "Action itself does not have a binding power; neither does it need one. It is the desire in action that has the power to bind us and tell us that freedom is not for mortals. But if, in action, sacrifice looms large, or if action is done in a spirit of sacrifice, or if action is considered another name for sacrifice, then action is perfection, action is illumination, action is liberation."38

The concept of selfless action, service given without regard for reward, is essential in Vedanta philosophy. The spiritual master is considered to be a completely free, liberated soul, whose only purpose in remaining in the material world is to enable others to also become free. In all aspects of the Hindu life, service looms large. Service to humanity is considered to be service to God in humanity and also service to one's larger self. Since all are essentially one, he who serves others is performing the same basic function as one who bandages his right hand with his left. There is no difference between a person and humanity at large. The important thing is to consider the act of service as the reward in itself.

38 Sri Chinmoy, Commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, p. 143.
In *Journey to the East*, the servant, Leo, is discovered at last to be the president of the League. On this journey, a trip through time and space, through psychic states and "the spiritual plane of existence," the humble servant is the one who guides, the indispensable leader. Here can be seen Hesse's kinship to the philosophy of Karma yoga, for Leo is an excellent Karma yogi. This book is a description of the quest to find the self, the separate goals of the members being only symbols for that self. And here, the most successful is he who serves others.

Even in his seemingly more selfish characters, such as Goldmund and Klingsor, who are both artists, we find that their art is a form of service and sacrifice. Goldmund sacrificed his most treasured possession, freedom, to the art of making images. This to him was a spiritual experience, a giving of himself. Art was a way of giving his truest self to the world, of creating "in order to step out of the fleeting transitions of life, to express the pure image of his being." The painter, Klingsor, displays the feeling of giving, of service, which art could represent. "He sensed with a deep faith that in this cruel struggle with his self-portrait more than the fate and the final accounting of an individual was involved, that he was doing something human, universal, necessary." There is often to be found in his novels the concept of giving. Art, for Hesse, is giving. The creative act is akin to spiritual ceremony, an offering to the self, to humanity, to God.

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41 Hermann Hesse, *Klingsor's Last Summer*, p. 216.
Journey to the East

In his next to last major novel, The Journey to the East, Hesse writes about a psychic journey, one in which "the commonplace aids of modern travel such as railways, steamers, telegraph, automobiles, airplanes, etc., were removed." The narrator, H.H., portrays this journey as one which goes through both space and time. In a dream-like state many things happen simultaneously; many barriers between the ordinary conscious state and the sub-conscious world are broken. The novel is peopled with Hesse's own friends, historical figures, and the characters of fiction (both his own and other's). It is a trip through Hesse's mind and psyche, revealing the author's own feelings and goals. It is a trip, not to the physical East, but to the spiritual East. Hesse had gone to India and had not found the spiritual experience for which he had hoped. But he came to know that the wealth of the East must be found within and not by traveling to a particular spot on the globe. His journey was one that looked toward that "spirit of the East which leads from Lao-tse to Jesus." This is the goal of the League of journeyers. "I realized that I had joined a pilgrimage to the East, seemingly a definite and single pilgrimage--but in reality in its broadest sense, this expedition to the East was not only mine and now; this process of believers and disciples had always and incessantly been moving towards the East, towards the Home of Light." This echoes the words of

42 Hermann Hesse, Journey to the East, pp. 5-6.
43 Hermann Hesse, Autobiographical Writings, p. 64.
44 Hermann Hesse, Journey to the East, p. 12.
the great Swami Vivekananda who saw "humanity as one vast organism, slowly coming towards light--a wonderful plant, slowly unfolding itself to that wonderful truth which is called God...." 45

In The Journey to the East, Hesse emphasized the super-rational as opposed to the ordinary rationality so glorified in much of Western thought. He always stressed the ultimate superiority of intuitive over the scientific. The League represents the world not seen by the ordinary eyes and not discoverable by scientific exploration. It represents a higher degree of reality. Hesse's major characters generally live by "the first principle of our great period, never to rely on and let myself be disconcerted by reason, always to know that faith is stronger than so-called reality." 46 Those last words, "so-called reality", can be found again and again in his writings. Hesse shared with Indian philosophy both a strong distrust of reason and a conviction that what could be perceived by our senses was far from being the only reality. He objected to the limitations imposed on human potential by defining reality in a strictly rational manner. For Hesse the world as experienced by the mundane senses and by reason is really only a cage. He would readily agree with India's great poet, Rabindra Nath Tagore, who spoke of this world as a prison. "I hope I do not belong to those who; born in a prison house, never have the good luck to know that it is a prison, who are blissfully unaware that the costliness of their furniture and profuseness of the provisions for their comfort act as invisible walls in a castle of vanity that not only rob them of their freedom but even of the desire for it." 47

45 Swami Vivekananda, Bhakti or Devotion, p. 6.
46 Hermann Hesse, Journey to the East, p. 54.
47 Christopher Isherwood, Vedanta for Modern Man, p. 92.
In *Journey to the East*, Hesse ignores the boundaries of the finite world. He poses an expanded reality for the reader, one which includes not only the world of the senses and the mind but one which includes the super-real. His League journeyers travel unfettered by space and time. They are on a spiritual journey, one which is shared by spiritual seekers everywhere: "Indeed our whole host and its great pilgrimage, was only a wave in the eternal stream of human beings, of the eternal strivings of the human spirit towards the East, towards Home."48 This "Home" is nothing other than the original source of creation, God. In the philosophy of the Hindu and in Hesse's books, this world is always Maya, the great game of the cosmic Mother. Its sole reality lies in our acceptance of it as the only reality. Once we remove the veil of Maya, the illusion is gone, name and form disappear. Leo says, "But no account of David can prove to me that life is not just a game. That is just what life is when it is beautiful and happy--a game. Naturally, one can also do all kinds of other things with it, make a duty of it, or a battleground, or a prison; but that does not make it any prettier."49 This echoes the view of this world held by the Vedantist. "After one realizes God, the world seems to be a mere appearance like a mirage." One knows well that there is no water in a mirage. Even though there seems to appear a world with names and forms, it is but an illusion, it is maya and remains a nothing. One must first attain knowledge, then one returns to this world of diversity seeing everything as before surely, but no longer being attached or attracted to anything in it. Prior to realizing

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49 Ibid., pp. 75-76.
that a mirage is an illusion, one expects water, but when one has the knowl-
dge of its nature one no longer expects to find water in it. So it is also
with one who has attained knowledge. Though the world of diversity is
experienced after knowledge, one no longer believes that diversity to be
real and therefore ceases to have any attachment to it, seeing only unity
and oneness." 50

Maya

This world of phenomenon is a shell housing reality. The object of
Hesse's search is always to break through the shell and reach what is within.
In The Indian Life, a story written by the Magister Ludi, Joseph Knecht,
Hesse portrays an experience of this world as Maya. While going to fetch
water for his teacher, Dasa is given an explicit lesson. In the fifteen
minutes it takes him to fill a water gourd from a stream and return with it
to the waiting yogi, Dasa experiences an entire lifetime. It is the yogi's
way of teaching him about the illusory nature of what Hesse termed "so-called
reality". Having experienced all the joys and sorrows of worldly life,
becoming a father, winning and losing a kingdom, the death of a son, etc.,
Dasa wakes up to find he has not really left the stream. He realizes that
even now as he has awakened from his dream he is still dreaming--that Maya,
the world, is only a dream. "And what was he experiencing this moment,
what he saw before his eyes, awakening from rulership and war and imprison-
ment, standing beside this spring, this gourd from which he had just spilled
a little water, together with what he was now thinking about it all--was not

50 Christopher Isherwood, Vedanta for Modern Man, p. 101.
all this made of the same stuff? Was it not dream, illusion, Maya? And everything he would still experience in the future, would see with his eyes and feel with his hands, up to the moment of his death—was it any different in substance, any different in kind? It was all a game and a sham, all foam and dream. It was Maya, the whole lovely and frightful, delicious and desperate kaleidoscope of life with its searing delights, its searing grieves. "51 He realizes that death is no escape because the wheel of reincarnation continues to turn. "That was, perhaps, a pause, a moment of rest, a chance to catch your breath. But then it went on, and once again you were one of the thousand figures engaged in the wild, intoxicating, desperate dance of life. Ah, there was no extinction. It went on forever."52 It is this knowledge, this experience of the absolute futility of ordinary life, that prepares Dasa for the long journey ahead, the journey towards liberation.

The character of Dasa had learned the lesson of life that Harry Haller was learning in the Magic Theater. Like Siddhartha, he is a more advanced Steppenwolf. Harry, the Steppenwolf, has more to learn, has more of life to experience, before facing the reality of it. He has to go through more suffering before learning how to laugh as Mozart laughs. In order to find the humor in life, to see that it is all a game, one must necessarily have extricated himself from life's snares. Maya must be transcended. The finite must give way to the infinite. Like a child, Harry is involved in the trivial. "A child's heart is broken by misfortunates we consider

51 Hermann Hesse, Magister Ludi, p. 518.
52 Ibid., p. 519.
trivial. He is each incident, being unable to see it against the backdrop of a whole, variable lifetime. A great deal of experience is required before a child shifts his self-identification away from the individual moment and becomes an adult. Compared with children we are mature but compared with saints we are children. No more capable of seeing our total selves in perspective than a three year-old who has broken her doll, our attention is fixated on our present lifespan. If only we could grow up completely we would discover that our total being is more vast than we suppose. We would find that it is infinite."{53}

Freedom and Morality

Goldmund, Harry Haller, Siddhartha, Sinclair, all Hesse's major characters, are seekers. They search within and without, through the sensual and the physical world, and through ascetic withdrawal from the physical world. But always they search for freedom, for the key that will enable them to find that which is eternal, real. Hesse felt that man must find his destiny, that no lasting happiness could be had until he had discovered the real self. Here lay the key to freedom. Narcissus tells Goldmund that he must be himself. Demian tells Sinclair that "One has to be able to crawl completely inside oneself, like a tortoise."{54} Hesse denied the validity of society's laws. He felt that man was a creature who had to strike out on his own. "He sees man as something superior to institution, dogma, and doctrine. Man must follow his own law, must act according to

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53 Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man*, p. 31.
54 Hermann Hesse, *Demian*, p. 54.
the free exercise of responsibility and be prepared always for new experiences and overtures."\(^{55}\)

To be free of the crushing burden of "so-called reality", man must heed only his inner voice. The great Swami Vivekananda, who brought Vedanta to the Western world in the last century, had this to say: "Society must be outgrown. We must crush law and become outlaws. ...Yesterday, competition was the law. Today, cooperation is the law. Tomorrow, there is no law. Let sages praise thee, or let the world blame. Let fortune itself come, or let poverty and rags stare thee in the face. Eat the herbs of the forest, one day, for food; and the next, share a banquet of fifty courses. Looking neither to right hand nor to the left, follow thou on!"\(^{56}\)

Hesse's characters are all outlaws. They all break the outer rules in order to follow their own inner law. Siddhartha leaves the world of his father, the world of law, order, and conformity, because he saw that these things could not lead him to the truth. Joseph Knecht leaves the safe, orderly world of Castalia, breaking the most sacred vows of Castalia in order to fulfill his inner dictates. Sinclair has to become an outcast to achieve his aims. "There are numerous ways in which God can make us lonely and lead us back to ourselves."\(^{57}\) The path to oneself is necessarily a solitary one for Hesse. Often his characters find it necessary to go against all rules and tradition in order to do what is, for them, the only true thing.

\(^{55}\) Bernhard Zeller, Portrait of Hesse, p. 152.

\(^{56}\) Swami Vivekananda, Bhakti or Devotion, pp. 50-51.

\(^{57}\) Hermann Hesse, Demian, p. 64.
In explaining to his superior why he must break all tradition and resign his exalted post as Magister Ludi, Knecht says, "I don't want to be regarded as a traitor or madman; that is a verdict I cannot accept. I have done something you must disapprove of, but I have done it because I had to, because it was incumbent upon me, because that is my destiny, which I believe in and which I assume with goodwill."\textsuperscript{58}

Hesse did not subscribe to the limitations placed upon the individual by the morality of the group, no matter how large the group. His characters always live outside the boundaries of accepted morality. They heed a call which comes from a sphere beyond ordinary concepts of morality. These characters and Hesse, himself, always strove for the ultimate, for what was eternal and beyond the bonds of the finite. This goal is not one which can be achieved by following codes and rules prescribed by those who are not searching for a similar goal. Therefore Hesse always felt the need to listen to a higher voice. This theory is compatible with Vedanta philosophy which places morality and spirituality in entirely separate categories. A great contemporary Indian sage puts it succinctly: "It is because morality is of this rigid unreal nature that it is in its principle and its working the contrary of the spiritual life. The spiritual life reveals the one essence in all, but reveals too its infinite diversity; it works for diversity in oneness and for perfection in that diversity. Morality lifts up on artificial standard contrary to the variety of life and the freedom of the spirit. Creating something mental, fixed and limited, it asks all

\textsuperscript{58} Hermann Hesse, \textit{Magister Ludi}, p. 373.
to conform to it. All must labour to acquire the same qualities and the same ideal nature. Morality is not divine or of the Divine; it is of man and human. Morality takes for its basic element a fixed division into the good and the bad; but this is an arbitrary notion. It takes things that are relative and tries to impose them as absolutes; for this good and this bad differ in differing climates and times, epochs and countries. The moral notion goes so far as to say that there are good desires and bad desires and calls on you to accept the one and reject the other. But the spiritual life demands that you should reject desire altogether. Its law is that you must cast aside all movements that draw you away from the Divine. You must reject them, not because they are bad in themselves,—for they may be good for another man or in another sphere,—but because they belong to the impulses or forces that, being unillumined and ignorant, stand in the way of your approach to the Divine. 59

Conclusion

Hermann Hesse's affinity for the wisdom of India is great. He was a Western man, a European, and much of his personal search for truth fell within the framework of Western tradition. His knowledge and extensive use of Vedanta philosophy in his writings and in his life never made him an imitator or follower of orthodox Hinduism. Always he remained his own man. But in the true sense of Vedanta philosophy he must be considered a Vedantist. The essence of Vedanta is that which transcends forms and cults, that which

59 The Mother, Conversations, p. 134.
aims at truth in its most exalted state. The Vedantist is not bound by nationalities. He is a child of the universe. Only one thing makes a Vedantist; the unflagging search for the infinite, the tireless effort to find the real and discard the unreal. The lifelong journey of Hermann Hesse towards his own soul qualifies him as a Vedantist.


