

Mysteries of the Heart: Thoughts on a Spiritual Life - Part One

Dorje Jinpa

*Ancient, yet always new
Hidden, yet apparent to all
The fiery heart, the most essential,
Alone it shines with the radiance of the
Supreme. (Abhinagupta)*

The following thoughts on the spiritual life are taken from some of the many scribbled notes made by me in my journals. I have been inspired in this by the Teacher, the illuminated author of Agni Yoga Teaching, who said, “Only the thread of the heart can lead to the Infinite.”¹

An illuminated consciousness is an experience of the heart. The clear perceptions generated by a fiery heart correspond to reality. Only by igniting the sacred fire of the heart can we attain the degree of selflessness necessary to perceive the truth uncolored by personal bias, beliefs, and desires, uncolored by either wishful thinking or fearful thinking. Only the unifying energy of the heart can transmute the suffering and spiritual loneliness of a seemingly isolated identity into the joy of realizing our essential unity with the whole of life. Only the fire of the heart can transmute our attachment to the material world into the freedom of the spiritual worlds. Only heart can liberate us from all outside conditioning.

The sacred fire of the heart is that golden stream of unifying energy that connects the individual consciousness with the essence of our innermost being. This heart essence has been given many names—Soul, Buddha-nature, Atman, and Christos. These names all pertain to the spark of the divine, the spiritual essence hidden within all beings. This universal heart essence is our true identity.

It is the nature of the heart consciousness to perceive the essential unity behind appearances. It is the nature of the rational mind to di-

vide and separate, to distinguish differences. Both are needed for a balanced well rounded development. But for most of us, the rational mind is more developed than the intuitive heart awareness. We are therefore inclined to believe falsely in the illusion of separation— separation from nature, separation from each other and separation from the source and essence of our being.

Our belief in separation has created in us a deep spiritual loneliness. It is this loneliness, this feeling of separation from life and meaning that is the primary cause of our suffering. This situation is what drives us to seek out love. But most of us are seeking love from others rather than generating it within ourselves. It is not always easy to understand that our joy arises, not from being loved, but by loving others.

When the consciousness is dominated by the illusion of separation, the psychic energy of the feeling nature manifests itself through a dark cloud of self-centered emotions and desires. It is these feelings that keep us in bondage by preventing the pure illuminating fire of the heart from penetrating the consciousness. When we begin, consciously and sincerely, to open the heart to the joy and suffering of others, to open to their essential nature, the distorted feeling energy is transmuted in the fire of the heart. The transmutation of emotion into love, self-centered feelings and desires into wisdom is the basis behind all the great world religions.

“May my path be marked with the attainment of selflessness.” This is the prayer of the heart.

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The term “self” implies “isolated identity.” Illumination removes the isolation. The identity that remains is pristine and universal.

The awakening heart consciousness experiences pure spiritual impulses from above. By responding to these impulses the pilgrim moves forward on the Path. However, the pilgrim is not the body, and the ascent is not a physical one. The great adventure forward takes place in spirit, in the consciousness, through a variety of worlds, planes and dimensions, of which the physical world is but one of many. Movement forward on the Way is not produced by brain impulses to the feet, but by striving, by thought and feeling. It is what we think about, what we admire, what we wish for and what we fear, that moves us either forward into the Light or into greater darkness.

The way forward into the Light is accomplished through the purification of the consciousness in the sacred fire of the heart. This is the basis of the spiritual life. As the consciousness opens its petals to the Light, it begins to perceive the spiritual nature behind the world of appearances. Fear is then replaced with awe and wonder, and great joy.

If we wish to journey into greater darkness we are free to do so. There is always a Choice. But we should remember that the seeming freedom of this path is an illusion. True freedom is attained only through self-mastery. True freedom is attained only when we can liberate ourselves from the dictates of the not-self (the body and the self-centered emotional nature) with which we have identified falsely.

The spirit evolves, not through compulsion or will, but through the power of attraction. No one is forced to move forward into the higher states of consciousness. It is only through the attraction of Spirit that we will find the upward way. *The spiritual life is attractive to a refined consciousness because it is so beautiful!*

Reverence, love, and the realization of beauty are expressions of a fiery heart. A love for the beauty of higher truth opens the door to clear perception. And as understanding dawns we begin to see just how beautiful these spiritual principles really are. This opens the door to the spark of the sacred Fire within us even wider

until we are literally flooded with revelation, the beauty and grandeur of which is beyond description.

The essential qualities of a refined spiritual consciousness are attained through striving. In fact, all movement through the school of life is accomplished by striving. Striving attracts like a magnet those energies and qualities which correspond to our heart’s desire. Striving influences events! The pure striving of an open heart attracts spiritual energies, spiritual possibilities, and spiritual potencies. The Teacher has said, “A striving will emanating from the fiery heart produces a vortex drawing in corresponding energies.”² The striving Will includes those subtle magnetic forces that invisibly bring into manifestation that which is willed.

The highest striving originates not from the separate self, but from the divine. When our hearts begin to beat in unison with the heartbeat of the divine, we naturally enter into and become a part of the spiritual striving of the world.

The Buddha named Six Perfections that we need to develop before illumination will manifest through us. Striving is the forth perfection.

1. The Perfection of Magnanimity
2. The Perfection of Selflessness
3. The Perfection of Patience.
4. The Perfection of Fiery Striving.
5. The Perfection of Meditative Quiescence.
6. The Perfection of Wisdom

Maitreya, the future Buddha, in his *Treatise on the Buddha Nature*, gave a very brief commentary on the Six Perfections: “The first perfection, magnanimity, is attained by giving. The second perfection of selflessness is attained through compassionate activity. The third and fifth perfections, patience and meditative quiescence, are attained through meditation. All the great perfections are attained through the forth perfection of fiery striving.” The perfection of wisdom arises when the first five perfections have been attained.

Our best striving will of course be motivated by love. If we love the beauty of higher truth, if we love the Way, if it holds for us a beauti-

ful attraction, then our striving will propel us toward the fulfillment of life's destiny. Pure striving is a concentration of the will that has been purified in the fire of the heart. "The joy of the heart," says the Teacher, "lies in striving upward."

The perfection of wisdom can be attained only through a refinement of the consciousness. There is no other way. The dictionary defines refinement as "the act of reducing to a pure state through the elimination of all coarse characteristics." Refinement means purification. All growth, all movement forward, all spiritual and aesthetic awareness, is attained through a refinement of the consciousness. By refining the consciousness obstructions to clear understanding are eliminated.

The refinement of our feeling nature is a necessary activity on the path to Infinity. Take some good feeling, such as gratitude, devotion, love, or the joy of spirit, and raise it up to a higher level, spiritualize it. "Any feeling can be cultivated," says the Teacher.³

The consciousness is refined by allowing our natural love of the beautiful to arise and grow within us and by guarding and nurturing this sacred fire as a rare and most valuable treasure. By striving for purity—purity of understanding, purity of motive and purity of feeling, the natural frequency of consciousness is refined. The consciousness is also refined by developing an awareness of the natural inclination within us to move toward perfection and by consciously and spontaneously following this spiritual inclination. In fine-tuning our feeling nature, paying particular attention to its quality under differing conditions, and by raising the vibrations of our feeling nature through pure striving, devotion to a teacher, prayer, and meditation we enter into refined realms of consciousness.

The more refined the consciousness the greater it expands, the more all-inclusive it becomes. The opposite is also true, the more self-centered, coarse and narrow our desires, the more constricting, fixed and limited will be our consciousness.

As we refine the consciousness our attraction to the pleasures of the material world becomes

progressively less and less. It is not that the pleasure of physical forms no longer attracts us, but rather that pleasure too is being refined, so that now we delight in greater pleasures. They are greater because they are wholesome (expressing wholeness), beautiful and long lasting. They are greater because they more closely express reality. Paramahansa Yogananda, one of the preeminent spiritual teachers of our times, once said: "It is by enjoying the bliss of spirit in meditation and by comparing it with the lesser joy of the senses that the devotee becomes eager to follow the spiritual path."⁴

By refining our sensitivity to beauty, so too will our sense of joy be refined and intensified. Pleasure is thus transmuted into joy. Joy is transformed into a deep and subtle bliss, intense, long-lasting and very beautiful. "The bliss of the yogi," says the Teacher, "is ecstasy over beauty."

To perceive the qualities of the spiritual world is to perceive its beauty. From the experience of beauty in nature one naturally advances to the beauty of spiritual truth. The greater the truth the greater will be its beauty.

Beauty is an exalted spiritual perception that the rational mind cannot, by itself, understand. Most academic types these days deny it altogether. Their argument being that "beauty is in the eyes of the beholder," In other words, beauty is subjective and is therefore only relative to the observer. But we must remember that the deeper aspects of the subjective, the internal universe, are collective, universal and of a greater reality than the outer so-called outer objective universe. The great sages proclaim beauty to be a universal principle.

Plotinus, one of the greatest of all Greek philosophers, taught that the inner vision could be awakened by looking to that which is beautiful and virtuous in life:

Shut your eyes and awaken that pure inner vision, which all men possess yet few make any use of. And what does this inner vision see? When it is first awakened it cannot at first perceive that which is so radiant with light. And so the soul must first be trained to perceive to the beauty in the life around

him, then to beautiful works, not those that the arts produce, but the work of Goodness itself. Then look to the souls of those who produce good work. And how is this inner beauty to be perceived?, by first looking for it within yourself. If you do not see it there, then just as a sculpture cuts away here and polishes there, till it becomes a beautiful statue, so you too must cut away the excess and straighten the crooked and clear away the dark, making it bright and never stop working on your inner stature till the divine glory of virtue shines out through you, until you see self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat. If you have become this, if you see it clearly and will be at home with yourself in purity, then there is nothing hindering you from becoming one with the essence of everything while yet remaining completely yourself, nothing but pure light, not measured by dimensions, either large or small or greatly expanded, neither bounded or unbounded but everywhere immeasurable because greater than all measure and superior to all quality... It is necessary that the perceiver and the thing perceived be united before true vision can exist.... *You must become beautiful and god-like if you wish to see God and Beauty.*⁵

The academic says that beauty is subjective and therefore has only a man-made make-believe significance. An awakened consciousness understands that beauty is a principle that is closely allied with the great law of harmony and equilibrium, which gives order and rhythm to the universe. By cultivating an awareness of beauty we can begin to experience a portion of those great spiritual principles that stand behind the laws of nature! *Only a heartfelt experience of the beautiful on earth can prepare us to experience the fiery beauty of the spiritual worlds.*

The beauty of spiritual truth is so vast that the closer we approach its mystery the greater is the realization that there will always be more to experience and understand.

Among the spiritual powers of the Buddha, as described for us by Maitreya in his *Treatise on the Buddha Nature*,⁶ is the ability to distinguish between what is natural and what is un-

natural. The term “natural,” as it was used in Hermetic philosophy meant that which is a direct manifestation of the divine, that which is in step with Evolution. Unnatural is that which is out of step with spiritual evolution. In this lies the primary distinction between those two mysterious Sanskrit concepts, dharma and karma. Both terms pertain to activity. Dharma is activity that is in step with spiritual evolution. Karma is activity that is not in step with evolution. Dharma, therefore, is natural, while karma is not. Technically, “dharma” means a manifestation of the divine, as the Buddha’s Teachings are said to be.

Natural is beautiful. Unnatural is not. Even children understand this. To create beauty, therefore, to live naturally, is to be in accord with the spiritual Path. Those artists who create beauty are on the spiritual path. The concepts “natural” and “beauty” will take on their true significance only when it is realized that there is a natural evolution of consciousness taking place here. Physical evolution will then be seen as but a dim reflection of something much greater. Someday, maybe in the far future, it will be discovered by scientists that Nature Herself is an intelligent living organism following a purpose and direction of which we know absolutely nothing.

By looking deeply into the cause of our unhappiness and dark emotions, we find that they all, without exception, stem from a self-centered egotism and personal bias arising from the illusion of separation. We can test this idea by observing closely whenever negative emotions arise and tracing them back to their source. If we can do this without any preconceptions or emotional involvement, if we can adopt the attitude of the detached observer, we may find that the cause can be traced, not to someone else, but to an attitude within ourselves. This attitude does not originate from our childhood, as some psychologists believe, but is much more basic. It relates to the human condition at its present stage of development. It stems from a basic misconception of who we are and the nature of the life in which we find ourselves. It is therefore, not so much a personal problem as it is a collective difficulty, one in which we all share.

Before we can accurately trace these separative feelings to their source, however, we must be willing to look at some hard truths about ourselves. We must be willing to admit, for example, that our anger, even our mild dislike of other people, is really an indication of a closed heart. It takes courage to reveal the truth to one's self. It takes courage to realize that whenever we look outside ourselves for the source of our happiness or pain, we do so out of fear, which to a large extent is the fear of responsibility. It is only when we are able to accept the responsibility for our own life stream, our own thoughts and feelings, that we will stop lying to ourselves, that we will be able to see the true cause of our particular state of mind, as well as our true station on the great Way. "A dark state of mind," says the Teacher, "is the source of all misfortune."⁷

We are deceiving ourselves if we believe the popular notion that our unhappiness is caused by someone else. The very first rule in any kind of relationship is that we are responsible for our own state of mind. When we react to someone by generating negative emotions, we do so by choice. What we think and feel need not be determined for us by others. Our feeling nature is not, or need not be, beyond our control.

One of the greatest obstacles to developing the heart consciousness is the fear of pain. This must be conquered before the Heart Essence, within oneself and within all life, can be fully realized. Contact with the Heart Essence expands and refines the consciousness, thereby not only increasing one's understanding but also increasing one's sensitivity to joy and pain. We must therefore learn to deal with this increased sensitivity.

The essential qualities of a refined spiritual consciousness are attained through striving. In fact, all movement through the school of life is accomplished by striving. Striving attracts like a magnet those energies and qualities which correspond to our heart's desire. Striving influences events! The pure striving of an open heart attracts spiritual energies, spiritual possibilities, and spiritual potencies.

Many people deal with emotional pain by hardening the heart, in other words, by deadening feeling awareness and sensitivity. The attraction to crudeness that is so widespread at this time is a good example of this. Another

example can be observed during a break-up between couples. Both parties invariably "harden their hearts: toward the other in an attempt to lessen the pain of separation. This subconscious, or perhaps semiconscious, procedure, working as it does on the assumption that "without the heart, I would not hurt so much," does not, in the long run, solve the problem. By hardening our feeling nature we

lose the ability to understand correctly and thereby to make the necessary decisions that will move us past the difficulty. The problems dealing with relationships will continue to arise until we can experience the trials of life without hardening the heart.

Again, this is not so much an individual problem as it is a collective human difficulty. Present day culture sees the problem quite simply—"for pain take a painkiller," forgetting that this destroys only our awareness of the pain, while the problem that caused the pain remains as does, on a subconscious level, the pain itself. This approach seeks the peace of oblivion. Narcotics do more harm than is usually understood. Not only do they desensitize physical and emotional sensitivity, they temporarily shut them down! Better is emotional stability and a deliberate raising and purifying the feeling consciousness in the sacred fire.

The reason that hardening the heart and the feeling nature eventually causes us so much grief is because it separates us, in consciousness, from the spiritual worlds and from the spiritual beings that live there. A crude feeling

nature cannot perceive the beauty of the higher worlds. Only a refined feeling nature can transform the consciousness from a state of petty isolation into an awareness of our interconnectedness with all life, including those higher dimensions of truth and beauty that lie beyond descriptive words.

The subconscious impulse to harden the heart, due to the fear of pain, lies at the root of the world's problems.

Says the Teacher, "Precisely, the heart can open the entrance into the Higher Worlds. No special asceticism is needed. Love, labor and beauty are within the reach of all."

It wouldn't be so hard to open the heart if we didn't fight against it, if we did not fear it so much. Perhaps we believe that an open heart will make us vulnerable. Perhaps we believe that only by hardening the heart will we become strong enough to deal with the harsh world around us. Or maybe we think that if we open the heart we will lose everything, that we will give away all our precious possessions, that we will allow other people to take advantage of us. However, this is only true if our giving arises from weakness.

Those with a true fiery heart are invincible. Intimidated giving is weak. However, when we give from strength, when our generosity streams forth like a river from the heart, the true source of all abundance, we grow in power. A fiery heart attracts to itself all that it needs, all that it desires. Nothing generates prosperity faster than a generous spirit.

Magnanimity is the natural expression of a selfless spirit. Universal truth is not personal, and as long as we continue to see everything only in relation to ourselves, so will our spiritual vision be limited, isolated and narrow. Only the selflessness of a freely giving spirit can perceive the truth clearly without the distorted coloring and bias of attachments. Nothing dissolves egotism faster than magnanimity. The Buddha named magnanimity as the "First Perfection." Ego loss and the fine art of giving are particularly beautiful when achieved in silence.

The awakening heart consciousness experiences joy for it perceives the beauty and grandeur

of its spiritual nature. The awakening heart consciousness hears the painful cries of humanity and is thus motivated to action. The awakening heart consciousness knows, without a shadow of doubt, that behind it all is Love. The awakening heart consciousness knows that out of this Love arises the creative impulse behind all that is beautiful. The awakening heart consciousness is invincible because it is inseparably interconnected with the power and heart essence of an infinite cosmos.

And where is this precious heart energy to be found? "We shall find its components," says the Teacher, "in religious ecstasy, when the heart quivers at the Highest Light. We shall find its components in the feeling of heart-felt love, when the tear of self-renunciation glistens. We shall discern it in the hero's achievement when power is multiplied in the name of humanity. We shall find it in the patience of the gardener when he ponders over the mystery hidden in a seed. We shall find it in the courage that pierces the darkness. We shall find it in the smile of a child when it is attracted to a sunbeam. We shall find it amidst all flights that carry us into the Infinite."⁸

Psychology without a spiritual basis will be false in its conclusions. Only a psychology that is closely coordinated with the natural evolution of the consciousness, as it expands to ever greater degrees of inclusiveness, synthesis, and love, will be effective in the long run in relieving the suffering of the world. Only that psychology which seeks to integrate the separate aspects of the human psyche will conform to spiritual evolution and therefore, to higher truth. This integration involves the alignment of the physical body, the emotional nature, and the mind, as an integrated personality, which can be united with the higher spiritual consciousness. The spiritual psychology of the future will be based upon the natural evolution of consciousness toward greater integration within the framework of holism and spiritual ecology.

The root causes of emotional imbalance, depression, mood swings, anger, and the rest, can be traced directly to a false identification with body and the form side of life. The true spiritual psychology of the future will understand

this truth. Remove the false identification through a realization that our true nature is at one with the spiritual heart essence within all life and the self-centered whirlwind of emotional entanglements miraculously disappears.

All psychological defense mechanisms are ultimately false. They are self-deceptions that we have created to defend against the possibility of being overwhelmed by feelings that we cannot as yet handle. They are lies that we tell ourselves in an attempt to lighten our burden and to protect our cherished sense of self. Defense mechanisms are beliefs that we often defend with fanatical zeal. They may be self-created to fit the circumstances, or they may be borrowed from some religious system, ideology or from the popular self-help literature of the day. One popular defense mechanism is the belief that our parents are responsible for all our emotional problems and hang-ups. The small degree of truth that is contained in this idea is made the scapegoat for all our problems. People want to believe it for it keeps them from facing the often painful truth that they are responsible for their own state of mind, that they have created most, if not all, of their problems themselves through the choices they have made, and by their thoughts and actions in this and in previous lives. The Teacher says, "It is difficult to realize misfortune as one's own mistake."

At times defense mechanisms can be temporarily necessary, because if the whole truth, our secret hatreds, motives, desires, etc., were to be revealed to us all at once it could be overwhelming; it could create an overload, an overstimulation of an unstable emotional nature. Yet if we are to attain any degree of freedom from the glimmers and illusions that afflict humanity, if we are to achieve integration (wholeness) and thereby some degree of sanity, all the defense mechanisms must go. This is self-mastery.

To obtain freedom from the limitations of emotional instability we must transmute desire into spiritual striving, transmute a self-centered perspective into a holistic, universal perspective. Enlightenment is total self-honesty.

It has been asked, "What is the distinction between channeling, clairvoyance, and illumina-

tion?" Channeling (psychism) is like receiving a message from an unknown person living in an unknown country, who describes for us conditions and events which we cannot easily verify. Clairvoyance is the direct perception of hidden conditions and events. Illumination is an understanding of the inner significance or meaning of conditions and events. Channeling, on the other hands, even when accurate and true, which is not always the case, is second hand information. There are numerous degrees of clairvoyant perception which even when accurately perceived may not always be correctly interpreted. Only the direct knowing of an illuminated consciousness can be totally relied upon.

Says the Teacher, "Psychism is a window into the Subtle World, but the teacher tells the pupil, 'Do not turn so often to the window. Look directly into the Book of Life.'"⁹

Many spiritual truths, when taken out of context, can lead to a false understanding. The popular truth, "It's all perfect," is a good example. When some seekers try to embrace this idea, they say to themselves: "If it's all perfect, then there is no need for me to strive for perfection." But it must be remembered that although, in essence, all is perfect, all is not complete or perfected in its manifestation in the three worlds of human evolution. The danger with using the word perfect is that it seems to imply completeness.

Spiritual evolution, the divine impulse that moves us all on the great Way through life, is indeed a perfect process. However, the product, the fruit, of this perfect system is yet to be fully manifested. And in this, many factors must be considered, not the least of which is the freewill of humanity, individually and collectively.

In essence, all is perfect. In manifestation, all is evolving toward perfection. And because we are, in essence, perfect, it is correct to affirm it. But this does not excuse us from the responsibility of manifesting this perfection in our lives and world.

Let's examine two contradictory schools of modern self-help psychology. The first, the most popular school, says that our negative

emotional states and conditions are natural; therefore, we should not feel guilty or berate ourselves when they arise. Rather we should learn to accept these emotions as they are. Instead of changing these negative emotional states, this school teaches that we should change our attitude toward them to one of acceptance and tolerance, thus eliminating the sense of conflict we have created in our selves.

The other, less popular school says that our negative emotional states and conditions are based upon delusion and are therefore not in harmony with the Path. They should be eliminated, says this school, by elevating the consciousness to the point where delusion, and its result, (negative emotional states) disappear.

The first school contains subtle half-truths that often cause its followers to give up the struggle to move forward into the Light. Only by elevating the consciousness, only by following the path of the heart, can the consciousness find liberation from delusion and the imprisoning influence of unstable and negative emotions.

Another way in which yogis have eliminated negative emotions is through attrition. It is a known fact that whatever we focus our attention upon within ourselves becomes stronger. When we can turn our attention away from negative emotions and desires, they will naturally die from lack of nourishment. But this must be done in the correct manner for when we suppress or fight against them directly they become stronger.

The attrition method will only partially free us from negative emotions. The primary problem stems from the fact that we have identified falsely with our emotions and desires. Only a realization of our true nature will completely liberate us from their influence. Illumination, which dissolves all negative emotion, is correct identification.

There is a natural law that states that for every upward striving of the spirit there is a reciprocal down-flow of spiritual energy. On the

highest level, it is the down-flow of cosmic fire that gives us the impulse to evolve according to divine purpose. It is the spark that illuminates consciousness and gives inspiration to the creative spirit. It is this current of divine fire, connected as it is to the source of life that is called the great spiritual Path, the Tao or Way, leading all life, seen and unseen, toward a predestined perfection. The current of evolution is a thread of cosmic heart energy uniting all life into a single forward moving continuum. This fiery current, acting through the divine Law of Attraction, is that which draws us ever higher up the mountain of experience, through the ascending degrees of realization and creativeness, to the very source and essence of Being.

Note: This article has been excerpted from the previously published, but long out of print, "Mysteries of the Heart," by Pentarba Publications.

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- 1 *Hierarchy* (New York: Agni Yoga Society, 1933), 149.
 - 2 *Fiery World III* (New York: The Agni Yoga Society, 1946), 305.
 - 3 *AUM* (New York: The Agni Yoga Society, 1933), 93.
 - 4 Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Bhagavad Gita* (Los Angeles: CA: The Self-Realization Fellowship, 1995), 270.
 - 5 Plotinus, *The Six Enneads*; translated by Stephen MacKenna and B. S. Page; The Sixth Ennead, Section 9. <http://classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.html>.
 - 6 Dorje Jinpa, *The Heart Essence of the Great Perfection by Maitreya* (Ashland, OR, Pentarba Publications, 2016).
 - 7 *Fiery World I* (New York: The Agni Yoga Society, 1934), 139.
 - 8 *Heart* (New York: The Agni Yoga Society, 1944), 509.
 9. *Fiery World II* (New York: The Agni Yoga Society, 1934), 14. Also see *Fiery World III*, 309.