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II. BOOK REVIEWS

Focus on Buddhism. A Guide to Audio-Visual Resources for Teaching Religion. Editor, Robert A. McDermott. *Focus on Hinduism and Buddhism*, Robert A. McDermott, series editor. Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books, 1981. 165 pages. 3 appendices, Index of Topics and Terms, Alphabetical Listing of Materials Reviewed.

Spiritual Discipline in Hinduism, Buddhism, and the West, by Harry M. Buck. *Focus on Hinduism and Buddhism*, Robert A. McDermott, series editor. Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books, 1981. 69 pages. Appendix, Bibliography, Glossary.

Few of the millions of students who attend colleges and universities in America receive any exposure to Asian thought. Of those few, the vast majority approach the East through generalized survey courses that cannot possibly do justice to the richness of the various Asian traditions; and in many cases these courses are taught by professors with little or no expertise in matters Asiatic. It is with a clear and realistic eye to this situation that Anima Books, under the general editorship of Robert A. McDermott, has published the six volumes that comprise the series *Focus on Hinduism and Buddhism*. These books are aimed primarily at non-specialist teachers who wish to supplement their lectures on Asian thought with audio-visual presentations, in the form of films, slide shows, or recordings. (One of the six, *Buddhism and Society in Southeast Asia*, by Donald K. Swearer, was reviewed by Robert J. Bickner in *JIAS*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 126–127.)

Focus on Buddhism is a marvelously useful guide to available audio-visual resources on Buddhism. In his brief but thoughtful Introduction, Prof. McDermott argues that, unlike such “religions of the Book” as Christianity and Islam, “Buddhism is remarkable for the degree to which it should be seen to be understood” (p. 5). He goes on to describe the aims and scope of the book and, most helpfully, to indicate those films that the reviewers found markedly superior and therefore worthy of special attention.

The heart of *Focus on Buddhism* is its reviews, which are divided into seven sections: General and Historical Introductions, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Himalaya, China, Japan and

Korea, and Buddhism in the West. The four primary reviewers are Frederick J. Streng (Indian Buddhism and General/Historical Introductions), Donald K. Swearer (Southeast Asian and Theravāda Buddhism), Robert A. F. Thurman (Tibetan and Chinese), and Richard B. Pilgrim (Japanese Buddhism). David Dell was the primary reviewer of the slides and recordings that are listed after the films in most sections. The reviews are concise and informative, generally describing the contents of the film (or slide show, or recording), evaluating its style and content, indicating the sorts of classroom use to which it might be put, and comparing it with other films under consideration. Throughout, the reviewers have taken particular care to praise films that reflect sound scholarship and to contrast them with those films that reflect sensationalistic or idiosyncratic views of Buddhism.

Each review is preceded by particulars of the film's production, running time, distribution, etc. This information—supplemented by appendices that list sources for additional information, distributors, and the names of filmmakers, narrators, and series—makes *Focus on Buddhism* as practical as it is informative. It should prove helpful to those teaching Buddhism at both introductory and more advanced levels, although particularly to the former, since few materials of a highly specialized nature have yet been produced.

Harry M. Buck's "essay" on *Spiritual Discipline in Hinduism, Buddhism, and the West*, like the other non-review-oriented books in the series, is intended as a companion volume to the books that focus on audio-visual materials available for the study of Hinduism and Buddhism. Beginning with the recognition that "Western students of religion, as well as a good many easterners, need a radical reorientation to understand meditation and spiritual practices" (p. 5), Prof. Buck attempts to delineate the essential yogic practices of Hinduism and Buddhism, both as systems unto themselves and as part of a broader human exploration of the "interiority of Deity."

Along the way, he brings out a number of important points. He emphasizes that spiritual discipline is fundamentally a form of action (*praxis*), action that is more than mere technique, and must be imparted by a teacher as sensitive to his student as is the teacher of a musical instrument. He recognizes that religious experience (defined, after Wach, as "a total response of a total person to what was seen as Ultimate Reality") is based on discipline of the body, speech, and mind, and that it is attained only

as part of a slow unfolding. He points out how the differing cosmologies and ontologies of monotheistic and non-monotheistic religions entail varying spiritual practices. He argues that religion is far more than a set of doctrines, and that teachers must attempt somehow to convey what it is like to *be* a Hindu or a Buddhist, which is to have a "commitment to Ultimate Reality that is quite different from the usual viewpoint of the West" (p. 33). He finds a common ground in prayer and mantra, each of whose aim is "to establish a relationship" (p. 49). Finally, he finds as "constant emphases" in Hindu and Buddhist spiritual practice three qualities: authentic immediacy, concentration on the present moment, and relaxed intensity.

Sound as many of Prof. Buck's points are, his discussion is undercut by a number of conceptual and factual problems. His contention that spiritual practice in general aims at "uniting my little self with the great life-giving Self in wholeness" (p. 6) would be acceptable to most Hindus, but hardly seems relevant to Buddhism. Similarly narrow is his definition of meditation as "a careful restraining of the faculty of attention to let go of all distractions from the present moment" (p. 12). This may (or may not) be the primary purpose of Zen or *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation (with which Prof. Buck seems somewhat familiar), but it fails to account for the great variety of experiences that may be classed as meditative, e.g., visualization, philosophical or topical analysis, etc. The injunction to "be here now" may be important to the meditator, but it is not all there is to meditative technique, let alone reflective of the often transcendental *goals* of meditation. A Buddha or a *jīvanmukta* undoubtedly is able to "be here now," but most Buddhists or Hindus would attribute to him attainments far surpassing simple presence-of-mind. Prof. Buck's discussions of mantra ("numinous sounds") and maṇḍalas (a search for wholeness through relating center with circumference) are suggestive only in the most general way, and give us little sense of the specific uses to which Hindus and Buddhists put these aids to meditation. Finally, it must be admitted that observation and/or control of the breath is an important basis for further meditation, but it hardly "renders teaching the doctrine superfluous" (p. 38)!

The book also contains a number of annoying—if not necessarily grave—factual errors. The Four Noble Truths are stated rather imprecisely, if not misleadingly, on p. 20. Zen did *not*, as maintained on p. 26, come to *Japan* through the efforts of Bodhidharma—who brought it from India to *China*. The Tibetan

“wheel of life” is held not in the jaws of “illusion” (p. 26), but of Yāma, the Lord of Death. A lama, contrary to what Prof. Buck says (p. 24), is not necessarily a “priest,” and only occasionally is a *tulku*. Tibetan meditation (with which Prof. Buck seems rather unfamiliar) is founded on considerably more than the “basic texts” listed by Prof. Buck, viz., the publications of Evans-Wentz (p. 24). In addition, there are various misspellings, misprints, and misplaced diacriticals, which more careful editing might have eliminated.

Despite its limitations, *Spiritual Discipline in Hinduism, Buddhism, and the West* may be used profitably, if cautiously, by teachers of courses in Asian religion or comparative religion, who may find its discussions occasionally stimulating, and its reviews of audio-visual materials useful.

Roger Jackson

Fundamentals of Tibetan Medicine, edited and translated by T. J. Tsarong, et al. Dharamsala: Tibetan Medical Centre, 1981.

One of the biggest problems in reviewing a book on Tibetan medicine is deciding on the proper approach to take. Should one approach the subject as an example of cultural history or anthropology? Should one see the book as an example of history of science? Some, I know, would take it as a medical textbook with no questions asked; but in the interests of maintaining neutrality, I shall take none of the above approaches, and yet all of them at the same time, by first discerning the purpose of the book, and then examining whether or not the book succeeds in its purpose.

The purpose of the book according to the publisher, is to “establish the Tibetan art of healing on a correct academic basis” in order to make a presentation to the “international community.” The publishers complain, and in some cases justifiably, that the few works published on the subject have often created “much misunderstanding and confusion.” The publisher goes on to name a number of authorities who had a hand in the work so that no one can doubt that this work was not the product of someone’s mistaken imagination.

The editors, along with the translator, echo the publisher’s sentiments, saying again that though the international commu-