

Cairo, Cannons, and Camaraderie

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The most talk about Shambhala in recent decades is made by Tibetans who have chosen America and their way of life as the ideal medium in which to preach, live, and enjoy. Shambhala has occupied an important place in Tibetan thought, though rarely mentioned in scriptures or written records. In spite of this and its frequent associations with Tibetan tradition, it was originally taught in India and associated with Hindu spiritual life. Sadhus in the north still talk about it, but I have never heard it mentioned in the south.

A group of Tibetan refugees, all of them ex-lamas turned farmers, became my disciples, but mostly for the good luck it would bring them. None of them knew or had heard about Shambhala, so it could not be widespread even in Tibet. Mystery mongers who blew the Tibet trumpet so loudly in the past — even claiming falsely to have been there and learned at the feet of the Great Masters — tend to forget the Lamaism, the Tibet religion and social pattern, is comparatively recent in its formation (seventh century).

Tradition relates that Padmasambhava, a far out and unusual Hindu sadhu, went to Tibet and founded the Lama pattern which supplanted, without eliminating entirely, the older Bon religion of spirits, demons, and magick. The majority of Tibetan scriptures are still translations from Hindu sources. Lamas do not call themselves Buddhist, though the Dalai Lama seems to have accepted Western opinion and embraces the Western classification of a Buddhist. Lamaism contains the concept of Buddhas, not as a personality or human individual, but in groups — mostly in fives, but also in hundreds — as awakened beings in the celestial planes. It is important to reflect on the facts if we are not to be misled with fiction.

Let me relate, if my brain cells keep awake, of a group in Cairo and my hearing for the first time of Shambhala, Ossendowski, Saint Yves, and much more, in a battle from which I emerged unscathed.

Many important events and clashes occurred in the years before the actual conflict which became World War II. The Spanish people had endured a heavy trip under the Inquisition which made the Catholic Church the largest landowner in Spain. Between prayers and priests was an overweight monarchy to crown poverty with royal approval.

After the first democratic government was elected, General Franco, aided by an airborne regiment of Moors from North Africa, attempted a Coup d'Etat to prove the

old ways were the best. In spite of aid from the reactionary elements of the Spanish Army, the takeover was blocked by the determination of the Spanish people themselves. Their heroism shook the world, and people came from every continent as volunteers to fight with the Spanish people.

They became known as the International Brigade, which contained men of every shade of political opinion. The Coup d'Etat turned into a battle and was drawn out for several years. Hitler and Mussolini, the dictators of Germany and Italy, supported Franco with planes, arms, tanks, and artillery. It was in Spain that they worked out a new modern form of warfare which in 1940 became reality in the form of the Nazi Blitzkrieg.

Since I was one of this unique International Brigade, I was able to experiment with my magick on the battlefield. I was graded as a 'practicante', something between a first-aid man and a doctor. But I also kept a very open eye on the ways and methods that military techniques were developing.

I knew in 1936 that my own country would be forced into a war with Germany, and I hoped that my personal observations and experience would be of value to Britain when the big bang came. The details of these events must come from other pens than mine. When war did start in 1939, I wrote to the War Office to offer my services. The letter may have got through the cobwebs to the old men who still dreamed of the trench warfare of 1914, the parade grounds, the polished boots, and the blanco.

Anyway, I did not receive a reply. As I was by profession a physiotherapist, I volunteered for the Medical Corps. Early in 1940, during the early period of the war, I was selected to go on a six month highly pressurized course in occupational therapy with several other delightful companions. Ten of us were selected to go overseas — one a corporal, and the other nine, including me, were privates (a shilling a day men).

Although we were privates in World War II in the modern army, either of these qualifications would entitle the rank of officer. Only a few days after enlistment, I was forced to realize that the fight against Hitler, his Nazi army, and his fat Italian ally was secondary. The real fight was between myself and the army brass, which ranged from senior NCOs who had been recruited from the most uneducated and stupid of Britain's lower crust.

My first battles were against church parades and all associated with them. Also, in my army papers, instead of my statement that I had no religion, somebody had slipped in the religion as "Baptist". It took two years to get it changed to atheist. I was not actually an atheist, but army officialdom maintained that in the British Army, nobody could be "no religion."

I won this, as most of my army battles, because the powers-that-should-not-have-been realized they would infringe the most sacred rule of the War Office and publicity might lead others to start thinking, since the brain was the least used organ in the British Army. Anyway, bullshit, blacking, and blanco did not require any thought.

After Chamberlain disappeared down the drain, Churchill took over and managed. But it took him many months to convince the brass hats that victory and winning the war were more important than parade grounds, shiny boots, and blanco. Few people knew that Churchill was also a mystic and had deep respect for people in the occult world. Slowly, very slowly, the army took on a new look.

My last days in Britain were spent in Leeds, and thence to the troopship which I

called my baptism of the Four Winds and the Seven Seas. Both Leeds and the troopship were very eventful periods. Then came the day we steamed up the Red Sea, gaped at Mount Sinai, and I knew my deepest wish had been granted. I had reached Egypt.

My disembarkation was delayed an hour or so. The High Command of the army came aboard to conduct an enquiry. It seems I was involved in a complete walk-off of the men from the troopship in which I was traveling. It appears that I was about to be indicted as one, if not the chief, of the ringleaders. Both the ship's adjutant and Medical Officer fired their cannon against me. It was said that I had made a speech on the quayside. I remained silent, and when asked to speak, I made a fiery speech about the filth on the ship and the demoralization which it produced.

I ended by accusing the guilty adjutant and MO of willful negligence adverse to the pursuit of the war and ultimate victory. The enquiry was completely reorganized and took a different turn. Since the object was only to point the finger and pronounce dire punishment, that finger was switched from me to the accusers. I was honourably discharged, but I got the plum posting of the group — a big hospital in Cairo. Just the ideal place to observe the Sphinx, the Pyramids, and the not too far off ruins of Memphis and the Zozer Pyramid — said to be the oldest stone building in the world as well as the fabulous tomb of the Serapis embalmed bulls.

My posting was not a reward, but a grapevine message from an unknown admirer told me that the intention was to put me near GHQ, so they could keep an eye on me. Magick works in many weird ways. There can be magick in words, and also in silence. The good posting in the Cairo Hospital was only a place where another battle was to start, but like all the others, I enjoyed it. A magician must never grow tired of victory. The magick is always to know the right thing to do, and the right time to do it. A magician may not know all the cards, but when he plays he must win.

Cairo gave me the delightful opportunity of meeting a lovely and beautiful French group of occultists, and also a far-out but smaller group of Greeks. I had always thought of Cairo as a world of Arabs and waving palms. They were there indeed, but Cairo had also large groups of European expatriates who live happily in their own closed communities.

The Giza Sporting Club was taken over by and for the relaxation of officers of the British Army. Our hospital was opposite, and by the grace of God, the Wheel of Fortune, and kind military pips, the hospital staff were given permission to use the swimming pool. If they expected a flood and splash of sisters and nurses, they were frustrated. Only the privates and lower crust of NCO visited it for a cool.

It was during one of these visits that I met Pierre, a Frenchman of a French banking family. From Sphinx, Pyramids, and ancient Egypt, we moved into deeper occult discussions. From these talks I was invited to visit his house any or every Sunday afternoon to meet other French people with the same interests.

It was a pleasant change for me, as I had little or no occupational therapy to do at the hospital and did not want any. The size of the group fluctuated between 7 and 15, but there was a solid core of about 7 which included two elderly men — who appeared to be the acknowledged leaders of final opinion if ever it were reached. The defects were obvious. While it is true that a group must talk and sift much evidence, there must always be a stage when the group must stop the chatter and carefully examine the progress which they have made, and the practical and usable results.

The results must be examined so that we know our results as a group or order, and also the more important finding of individual and personal attainment. A group must only be itself, having its own name, its own things, its own interests and its own goals. When it becomes a mixture of other groups, societies, or organizations, it must fail in its purpose or remain just a group of talkers and listeners, and even generate boredom.

The trouble with book knowledge is you become conditioned by the black and white thought passing before your eyes in the form of print. Doctors sometimes give people medicines which they don't take themselves, as caterers sell food to other people which they would not eat themselves.

Most occult literature has been written by armchair philosophers or journalists in a library with one eye on the royalties, and so very few by awakened magicians or people with experience. We must discriminate between information, opinion, and real wisdom. Of course, I too went through the occult rat-race. For 9 months I spent every Saturday afternoon between the Egyptian galleries and the Reading Room at the British Museum. When I reached Egypt, I realized its past was only a parade of death, and the present only squalor and poverty.

The fragrance of the mysterious Orient was not easy to endure in the polluted atmosphere of dust, stench, and filth. Yet much to my surprise, there were vast numbers of Europeans living in the suburbs and more secluded parts of the city, as well as stores and business houses. Everything associated with camel dung, polluted water, and night shirts was done by foreigners.

Of the French group, only a few are fixed in memory: the two elderly men, Andre and Rene, who both wrote books but were also schoolteachers. The French had school facilities for the French community. I have realized that one of these was Rene Guenon. I knew this at the time, and remember wondering why he did not change his surname as it was shared by a species of grizzly-furred monkeys.

Although Guenon does state in his book, *Lord of the World*, that Shambhala-Agharti might be a real place — an underground city — he also thinks it might be only a spiritual concept. However, the French occult concentrate always discussed this as an underground complex which might contain living people. There were also ideas to try to find it one day. I myself expressed the view that it might have been a living place once, but as a tradition passed down to us it should be regarded only as a spiritual frame on which to build

No one had thought that if there were some living underground world — and the arguments against it are numerous — what would happen if it were found? If only 1% of the world's population rusted to this paradise, thousands would be trampled under in the rush. How many could get in, what would they live on, and would they be welcome?

India's mountain state of Tripura — probably named after the Goddess — has its capital of Agartala, and to those who have investigated the Lokas or Planes of Hinduism as well as the lower regions will note the underground dwelling places who behave in a certain way are all called Talas: viz. Atala, Vitala, Sutala, Talatala, Mahatala, Rasatala, and Patala.

These are conceived as planes of existence for the spirit during some periods. They are the Pagan Underworld and not to be considered in the Christian sense as places of torment. Seven are generally mentioned, and the Greek Underworld had the same

number of divisions. The concept was almost universal throughout the Pagan world, and this and many others were passed down through thousands of years.

The Cairo group dwelt much on this matter, and said they had connection with people who had explored (but only superficially) cavern complexes in the rocky hills which border the Nile outside Cairo. But a real search required costly equipment and suitable illumination which, in war time, was not obtainable. But someday! The Cairo group did nothing practical. Their approach was purely academic because the leaders were academic.

No one seems to have got anything except interest and entertainment. The highlight was Zoe. She was a typical French girl, as delightful as Burgundy wine and as French as a rubber condom. She turned out to be a very pleasant flesh pot, and the only spark, whether in thought or action, of sex in the group.

Zoe stood apart because her prime interests were mediumship, Tarot, and divination in general, streaked with a splash of the erotic. Academically she was at the bottom, but as an enchantress she towered above all others in the group.

It became very obvious that sex or fleshly associations was not a forbidden subject, but one that embarrassed them. In my youth, we would think about Paris as a city of "sin", naked dancers, much folly, and plenty of what it takes to make boys happy. I did visit Paris twice in the years before World War II, and found the French more narrow-minded than my own people, and even Montmartre had been cleaned up and lost its value as a tourist draw. It were ever thus.