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The Book of Enlightened Masters: Western Teachers in Eastern Traditions.
By Andrew Rawlinson. Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1997.
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This book surveys Westerners (non-Asians, for the most part) who are teachers, gurus, masters, or priests in so-called Eastern traditions. The traditions in question are primarily three: Hindu, Buddhist, and Sufi. The main focus of the book is on Western Europe and North America during the past 100 years (there are a few exceptions).

The book is divided into two main sections: (1) a lengthy introductory essay in which the author generalizes about the phenomenon under review; and (2) an alphabetical directory that discusses nearly 150 individuals, followed by an appendix that includes an additional thirty "minibiographies" of Western teachers.

To my knowledge, this is the first attempt to cover this subject. The author has assembled an impressive amount of information about these "masters" and has arranged it in an easily accessible way. There are many cross-references, and each individual's entry contains biographical data, some comments on the person's central teachings or practices, and primary and secondary bibliographical references when available. Although meant as a reference work, the book can also be read as a history and survey of the West's appropriation of Eastern religious traditions through Westerners' direct participation in and leadership of these traditions.

In the introductory essay, Rawlinson makes several important claims. First, he claims that Eastern traditions have undergone such important changes as a result of their appropriation by the West that we have come to see the end of the era of self-contained religious traditions (p. 97). Western teachers have so modified and combined the Eastern religions that the religions have outgrown their own indigenous categories.

Second, the Western teachers have articulated, more or less in unison, what Rawlinson calls "a new explanation of the human condition," a "spiritual psychology." This spiritual psychology, he says, has four aspects to it: (1) "Human beings are best understood in terms of *consciousness* and its modifications"; (2) "consciousness can be transformed by *spiritual practice*"; (3) "there are *gurus/masters/teachers* who have done this"; and (4) "they can help others do the same by some form of *transmission*" (p. 96). It is Rawlinson's claim that ritual, belief, and custom are all subordinate to spiritual psychology or consciousness, in greater or lesser measure, in each of the Western teachers. The emphasis of almost all of the Western teachers is experiential, he argues, rather than doctrinal or ritualistic.

Needless to say, this description works better for some Western teachers than for others. In general, the teachers of the so-called Sufi traditions, many of whom are self-consciously trying to separate themselves from Islamic roots, fit the model well, as do many Buddhist masters. The ISKCON (Krishna) gurus, however, fit less well, precisely because their founder,

Bhaktivedanta, emphasized the importance of preserving the distinctively Hindu (Indian) features of Krishna devotion, including a distinctive style of worship, dress and diet. Some Western masters, to be sure, have stretched the categories of the Eastern religions. Others, however, have taken pains to replicate the Eastern traditions in the West in their traditional, Asian forms.

In his introduction, Rawlinson tries to give a comprehensive picture of his subject by offering an elaborate typology. He places individuals and their teachings, practices, and methods of transmission within a grid of four quadrants: hot, cool, structured, and unstructured. *Hot* is something different from, other than, the self. It is overwhelming, numinous, and is generally perceived via revelation or grace. It is definitely beyond one's control. *Cool*, by contrast, is identified with oneself. It is "quiet and still, and is associated with self-realization" (p. 98). *Structured* means there is order in the universe, there "is something to be discovered and there is a way of discovering it" (p. 98). *Unstructured* means there is no separation between reality as we experience it and God. "Everything is available now and always has been" (p. 99). Individuals and traditions usually are combinations of these four characteristics.

The grid is a useful way of characterizing theologies/philosophies, traditions, teachings, and world views. Rawlinson does place many of the individuals he discusses later on in his directory on the grid to illustrate how the model works (pp. 111-34). In the second half of the book, however, the directory and appendix of minibiographies, no more mention is made of this typology.

In the introductory essay, Rawlinson also discusses the importance of Western women in the teaching of Eastern traditions. He notes that women in the West have often insisted on being included in the Eastern traditions as full participants and leaders. In this sense, Western women have often played pioneering roles in these traditions, especially the Sufi and Buddhist traditions. In the case of Buddhism, he cites several cases of women agitating successfully for monastic ordination in traditions where it has been lost or forbidden (p. 141).

I have used such terms as "Eastern" and "Sufi" with hesitation. This is related to another issue that Rawlinson is concerned with throughout his book, namely, the extent to which it is still accurate to describe the teachings and practices of some Western practitioners and teachers as Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, or Sufi. Some Western teachers/gurus have so altered these Asian traditions that they are no longer readily recognizable, and the teachers themselves often shun traditional labels. This raises the basic question of whether we are still dealing with "Eastern" traditions, the ostensible subject of the book. Rawlinson seems to think that in almost all cases we are, but I wonder

what Asian practitioners of these traditions might think.

The directory itself is a treat. The biographical details are often rich, the summary of teachings succinct, and cross-references and bibliography helpful. In many cases there are photographs. Although the book as a whole tends to be upbeat, taking a more or less positive and admiring view of most of the individuals discussed, Rawlinson does not shy away from unsavory details. He gives a detailed description, for example, of Swami Kirtananda, a Krishna teacher who heads the West Virginia temple and community at New Vrindaban, and who has been an embarrassment to ISKCON over the years (pp. 186-94).

Rawlinson also treats the reader to several delectable examples of spiritual bragging by some of the "masters" he discusses. Master Da (born Franklin Jones), who seems of truly gargantuan ego, and who has changed his religious name on many occasions (Avatar Adi Da Samraj, Da Avabhasa, Da Kalki, Heart-Master Da Love-Ananda, Da Free John, and Bubba Free John —my personal favorite), claims that he is essentially divine and underwent a "divine descent" whereby he took on human form. In Hindu terms, he claims that he is an *avatara*. He says, "This body died, I left this body. And then I suddenly found My Self [he always uses caps to refer to himself, and also often refers to himself in the third person] reintegrated with it, but in a totally different disposition, and I achieved your likeness exactly, thoroughly, to the bottoms of my feet, achieved un-Enlightenment, achieved human existence, achieved mortality, achieved sorrow" (p. 227).

Some of the entries are just plain funny. Oom the Omnipotent, mentioned in the appendix of minibiographies (you have to admire a man who came up with such an extraordinary name, Rawlinson remarks), founded a Tantric order in New York in 1909, arranged "a wedding banquet eaten off coffins" and became a millionaire president of a bank in New Jersey (p. 617).

The directory contains some wonderful footnotes. A long one concerns accusations of faked "channeling" (as it is called today) made against Madame Blavatsky by her associates and the results of the Society for Psychical Research's investigation of her (p. 194n). Another note tells of recent negotiations with Roshi Richard Baker concerning Rawlinson's account of a recent controversy in Baker's community. The note suggests that Rawlinson is in direct contact with many of the individuals he is describing and is up to date on the latest developments.

The book mentions a few movements of particular interest because they combine Eastern and Western religions or adapt Eastern religions to Western cultural styles. Of special interest to me were the Rajarajeshwari Peetham in

New York (pp. 239-43), run by three American women authorized to teach by Hindu masters, and Christian Zen as represented by Father Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle (pp. 256-61). The Rajarajeshwari Peethan is self-consciously Hindu and Indian, and most of its members are of Hindu background. Nevertheless, the organization has introduced such American practices as summer camp, nature programs, and sports. What we have is properly and traditionally garbed Hinduism in the United States, directed by three non-Asian women who are priests and teachers (very unusual in Hindu India) in a context of American religious style. In the case of Christian Zen, we have avowed Christians (often priests or clergy) practicing Zen as a spiritual preference.

At a few points, Rawlinson seems constrained to make personal judgments, seeming to step outside his role as objective scholar. For example, about Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux) he concludes, "In short, Henri Le Saux/Abhishiktananda was realized or enlightened, and everything he wrote and did was informed by this realization" (p. 149). In discussing Roshi Reb Anderson, he doesn't hesitate to say, "There is a definite need for more openness and democracy in American Zen" (p. 163). In general, though, Rawlinson is remarkably restrained.

Enlightened Masters represents a remarkable feat. Rawlinson is to be congratulated on presenting in vivid detail the lives and teachings of a large group of unusual and complex individuals.