

[Shirley MacLaine Meets Socrates](#)

Category : [April 1987](#)

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Remember the 60's? Singapore outlawed men with long hair. Materialism was out; protest and self-reflection were in. The Beatles brought Mahesh Maharishi to the West, and America became a net importer of Eastern religious thought. There was chemical chaos and psychedelic everything. For a fleeting decade there was a serious urge to "know thyself." Questions were plentiful: "Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? Can I crash for the night?" Well, forget the 60's. This is the 80's where the important inquiries are made with one's stockbroker. Everything's different now. Or is it?

Writing about the Shirley MacLaine phenomenon in this issue made us pause and reflect on a number of things, like: What does it mean to have a heads-up woman presenting our tradition to the West? Have the me-myself-and-I Yuppies hit their noggins getting out of '87 Mercedes and experienced a spiritual awakening? It is significant that America's secular sovereign, an actor, is now joined by its spiritual princess, also an actor?

We got to musing about such things, more or less uncreatively assuming that we would end up with an interview that contained cogent answers to difficult questions. That's what we normally do, ask ourselves probing questions about major subjects in the current issue, then provide editorial insight. Query, answer. Query, answer. Ho, Hum.

Think about it. The really good teachers take the high road, merely asking questions. Take Socrates. Query, no answer. Brilliant! And those Zen masters with their inscrutable koans. Elegant! Why didn't we think of this before? It's so easy to ask a meaningful question and so hard to provide compelling answers - easy for the preceptor that is, hard on the hapless aspirant. Thus did we resolve to ask all the questions this time, and to let, you, our noble readers, agonize over the answers - a strategy, by the way, which saved so much space that we can share, at the end, a little Rudyard Kipling ditty that we found buried in Shirley's newest book. Shall we

begin?

Why is it that India, glorious, ancient India, can stir an outlander's soul, inspiring people like Shirley to seek and then to march forth singing spiritual glorious to millions, and yet that same India rarely stirs her own children so? Why is Shirley not telling much about India and Hinduism? Is she afraid of a negative (Rajneesh wasn't that long ago) backwash? Does she want to protect the Sacred Source from unseemly criticism? Is it perhaps her thoughtful conclusion that fundamentalists would rail against Hindus if she did? If so, doesn't that make her smarter than you and I thought, and more courageous?

Speaking of fundamentalists, does Shirley know that they have started a campaign against her, a big one? Is she aware that our source, reporter Mary Rothschild, has been hassled all week for the harmless article she wrote in Seattle on the Higher Self Seminar? Where is Christian love when they hammer away at good folks like Mary? What motivated them to ululate so, calling Shirley's teachings "satanic" and telling Mary she was brainwashed and would go to their Hell unless she accepts Jesus Christ as savior? Did Jesus' disciples not suffer similarly from a dominant, arrogant Roman religion? Haven't Christians learned any lessons from that awful part of their early history?

Is the Shirley MacLaine phenomenon a short-lived fad or the beginning of a mature cycle of self-inquiry, the long-awaited Golden Age? Is it pop culture, sort of a reincarnation of EST or Silva Mind Control? Can Yuppies really take something as demanding as true spirituality seriously, What will they do when it comes time to learn about little things like sacrifice, selfless service, surrendering the ego, disciplining desire? Will it be the Higher Self this week-end and home-made cheesemaking the next? Or is it a cycle wherein there will always be a "Shirley MacLaine" out there (a Ram Dass, a Muktananda, a Werner Erhart) meeting a need for the few and just titillating the many?

Will the more traditional Hindu and yoga groups benefit from Shirley's efforts to spread the Dharma? Or will they be suddenly inundated by curious crowds who will disappear just as swiftly, leaving the carpets dirty, the ashram devotees exhausted and the cupboard empty?

Tell me, do you see the past repeating itself here? Didn't Paul Brunton's Search in Secret India similarly capture the Western mind long years ago? How about Yogananda's perennial Autobiography of a Yogi? Is this that cycle relived by a new generation, echoing again all the wondrous and mystical happenings, the miracles, the very un-Western interpretations of life's meaning? Quick, how many thousands of trees would be saved if we got an injunction to stop Bantam Books from further ramifying things and required this new crop to read the classics? On reflection, what could be more ridiculous than not letting each generation rediscover Truth for itself, and enjoying their unique style brought to the process? Don't you imagine that the punk rocker in the town square with diaper pins in his ear lobe and an emerald/magenta mohawk is really an evolving soul, deep down, and thinks about ultimate matters, too?

Is Shirley the only women doing this kind of thing? What about Ma Yoga Shakti, Anandamaya Ma, Swami Radha, Madama Blavatsky, Ruth Montgomery and the Brahma Kumaris? Are they too shy, too traditional, to be effective? Is spiritual effectiveness measured in Nielsen ratings points?

Shall we accuse Shirley of being too much of a marketplace missionary, sort of an Oriental clone of Jerry Falwell or Billy Graham? Then again, don't we need good missionaries, and lots of them? Besides, isn't it true that she recently said "self-realization does not lend itself to proselytization, but is highly personal and ultimately self-responsible?" Then is she a guru? How can that be when she wisely avoids that complex role and throws the responsibility back on the person quoting the old saw, "When the student is ready, the teacher appears?"

Aren't you just a little tired of all these questions? Are you feeling a little more sympathetic toward Socrates' apprentices? Did I forget to mention that answers to every question should be on my desk before the next issue and I want them from every single subscriber, no exceptions? Am I going to get them? What do you think? Shall we get to that poem by Kipling?

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