

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

FREDERIC SPIEGELBERG (1897-1994)

Frederic Spiegelberg, Professor (emeritus) of Indian Civilization, died at the age of 97 in San Francisco Nov. 10, 1994, of complications after surgery. Spiegelberg had come to Stanford in 1941 as lecturer in religion, was made Associate Professor in 1955 (in the then Department of Asiatic and Slavic Studies), and Professor in the Department of Asian Languages in 1960. He retired in 1962. Born in Hamburg, Germany, he obtained the doctorate in Tübingen in 1922, and in 1925 was awarded a theological degree (S.T.M., in Hamburg) by the German Lutheran Church. In 1933 he was appointed to the professorship in the University of Dresden that had been vacated by Paul Tillich, who in 1937 helped Spiegelberg and his late wife Rosalie escape from Nazi Germany. Temporary or visiting appointments later included Columbia University, the University of Rochester, the University of California, Union Theological Seminary, the Pacific School of Religion, and the C.G. Jung Institute in of Zurich.

While still in Europe, Spiegelberg studied under Rudolph Otto, Paul Tillich, Martin Heidegger and Carl Jung. His books in German include The Religious Experience of Plotinus, Martin Luther's Position on Sacred Text, and The Secularization of the Japanese Mentality. Among his books in English there are Alchemy as a Way of Salvation (1945), The Religion of No Religion (1948), Spiritual Practices of India (1952), Living Religions of the World (1956), and Zen, Rocks and Waters (1961); he was co-editor of The Bible of the World (1939). He knew and used the classical religious languages of India (Sanskrit and Pali) and of the West (Latin, Greek and Hebrew). He presented occasional papers at meetings of the American Oriental Society, and in 1948 was elected president of the Pacific Coast Association of Religious Studies. In 1950 he helped found the American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco, and became its director in 1951. The first accredited graduate school in the United States devoted exclusively to the study of Asiatic lands and peoples, the Academy's focus was on the confluence of modern Western psychology and the ancient religious philosophies of the East, and in this way played a leading role in developing wide interest in studies of this kind, especially in California. (This institution has since been succeeded by the California Institute of Integral Studies.) One of Spiegelberg's students, Michael Murphy, was founder of the Esalen Institute in Big Sur.

From the first a charismatic teacher at Stanford -- his student Murphy has described him as "the greatest lecturer I ever heard" -- Professor Spiegelberg eventually required Memorial Auditorium for courses which could exceed 1,000 students. In 1950, before there were university teaching awards, he was voted one of two "great teachers" by the Student Executive Committee. He gained widespread public attention in 1949, returning

after a half-year of research and travel in India and the Himalayan foothills of Tibet, where he discovered a 200 year old manuscript of a previously unknown text (titled in Tibetan 'Dig Sha') by the first century Indian Madhyamika Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna, predicting the coming of "black ages" characterized by an utter collapse of morals and standards -- a basic theme in later popular Buddhist faith cults in China and Japan. He also began an outstanding collection of wood-block prints of Tibetan cultic demons, divinities and charms, displayed in the Stanford Art Gallery in 1956.

His most arresting discovery during the 1948 trip was Tibetan "ghost traps," intricate structures up to ten feet high, of wooden masts and struts strung with many yards of multi-colored yarn, dotted with tufts of wool. There are sixteen types of traps; they are mounted atop houses, for catching malevolent demons causing illness and misfortune. (A ghost is conceived to be liquid, and is thought to become entangled in the trap making the tufts damp; the trap must then be destroyed.) Spiegelberg persuaded the abbot of a monastery in Sikkim to have examples of each type made; these were completed and sent here in 1955, when they were displayed at the Art Gallery and later donated to our museum. The news media gave the matter excited attention: they appeared on television programs, including "Mickey Mouse Club," and were photographed for publication by Time Magazine and Popular Science Monthly. Several smaller ones were permanent decorations in Professor Spiegelberg's office.

These things show Spiegelberg an able popularizer, but he never abandoned an ideal of scholarly rigor, eloquently expressed in a prospectus for one of his writing projects: He would aim at a terse style of interpretation, "on the one hand impeccably scholarly and on the other hand definitely popular, so as not to scare but rather to attract the general reader, whose interest should be kept alive by the philosophical and psychological implications" of the material. Tibetan culture he saw as a high religion (Buddhism) containing and preserving a "crude primitivity," alive in Tibet but repressed in other cultures, expressed in village art in the "prevalence of the demonic and the destructive aspect of the divinities shown." One senses the qualities that so engaged his students.

He was well liked by his colleagues; the few left remember him as a man of smiling dry wit. Warned about the Bhutanese women in a certain village (which he avoided), that they had magical powers and could turn men into goats, he remarked that this is a feat that "occasionally has Western parallels." Once asked if his famous ghost traps sent from Sikkim had ghosts entrapped in them, he replied, "No, they are new; after all, when you buy mousetraps, you do not get mice along with them." Asked by an Indian acquaintance (before his trip there) if he had ever been in India, he replied "Not in this life." Relating this, Spiegelberg said, "He understood me perfectly!" But Spiegelberg's mind (one thinks of Wang Yangming's last words) was clear to the end, even at 97, utterly serious in a religions-transcending religious stance, as his close friends describe him: any fixed, exclusive notion of a "right way" of spirit he deemed a form of idolatry.

We now should be mindful that Frederic Spiegelberg's career at Stanford was important for the University's then and later expanding development in Asian Studies. Eventually Stanford prudently decided to concentrate its efforts in the Chinese and Japanese fields rather than to attempt to become a major center of South Asian teaching

and research. (Important strengths in Religious Studies were to come later.) But Frederic Spiegelberg was a presence; his highly successful teaching, writing and publicizing helped to make it unthinkable that post-war Stanford could fail to move on, as it has, to develop and to maintain its prominence in Asian fields in diverse disciplines.

David S. Nivison, Chair
Thomas W. Hare
Michael Murphy
Lee H. Yearley