

The Theosophical Society and Its Work
From the Maha-Chohan
To A.P. Sinnett

C. Jinarâjadâsa (compiler)
Letters From the Masters of the Wisdom, First Series
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--Letter 1--

An abridged version of the view of the Chohan on the T.S. from his own words as given last night. My own letter, the answer to yours, will shortly follow.

K.H.

The doctrine we promulgate being the only true one, must, supported by such evidence as we are preparing to give become ultimately triumphant as every other truth. Yet it is absolutely necessary to inculcate it gradually, enforcing its theories, unimpeachable facts for those who know, with direct inferences deduced from and corroborated by the evidence furnished by modern exact science. That is the reason why Colonel H.S.O., who works but to revive Buddhism, may be regarded as one who labours in the true path of theosophy, far more than any other man who chooses as his goal the gratification of his own ardent aspirations for occult knowledge. Buddhism, stripped of its superstitions, is eternal truth, and he who strives for the latter is striving for Theos-Sophia, Divine Wisdom, which is a synonym of truth.

For our doctrines to practically react on the so-called moral code, or the ideas of truthfulness, purity, self-denial, charity, etc., we have to popularize a knowledge of theosophy. It is not the individual and determined purpose of attaining oneself Nirvana (the culmination of all knowledge and absolute wisdom) which is after all only an exalted and glorious *selfishness*—but the self-sacrificing pursuit of the best means to lead on the right path our neighbour, to cause as many of our fellow-creatures as we possibly can to benefit by it, which constitutes the true theosophist.

The intellectual portions of mankind seem to be fast drifting into two classes, the one unconsciously preparing for itself long periods of temporary annihilation or states of non-consciousness, owing to the deliberate surrender of their intellect, its imprisonment in the narrow grooves of bigotry and superstition, a process which cannot fail to lead to the utter deformation of the intellectual principle; the other unrestrainedly indulging its animal propensities with the deliberate intention of *submitting* to annihilation pure and simple in case of failure, to millenniums of degradation after physical dissolution. Those 'intellectual classes', reacting upon the ignorant masses which they attract and which look up to them as noble and fit examples to follow, degrade and morally ruin those they ought to protect and guide. Between degrading superstition and still more degrading brutal materialism, the white dove of truth has hardly room where to rest her weary unwelcome foot.

It is time that theosophy should enter the arena; the sons of theosophists are more likely to become in their turn theosophists than anything else. No messenger of truth, no prophet has ever achieved during his lifetime a complete triumph, not even Buddha.

The Theosophical Society was chosen as the corner-stone, the foundation of the future religions of humanity. To achieve the proposed object, a greater, wiser, and especially a more benevolent intermingling of the high and the low, of the Alpha and the Omega of society, was determined upon. The white race must be the first to stretch out the hand of fellowship to the dark nations, to call the poor despised 'nigger' brother. This prospect may not smile to all, but he is no Theosophist who objects to this principle.

In view of the ever-increasing triumph and at the same time misuse of free-thought and *liberty* (the universal reign of Satan, Éliphas Levi would have called it), how is the combative *natural* instinct of man to be restrained from inflicting hither-to unheard-of cruelty and enormities, tyranny, injustice, etc., if not through the soothing influence of a brotherhood, and of the practical application of Buddha's esoteric doctrines?

For as everyone knows, total emancipation from authority of the one all-pervading power or law called God by the priests—Buddha, Divine Wisdom and enlightenment or Theosophy, by the philosophers of all ages—means also the emancipation from that of human law. Once unfettered and delivered from their dead weight of dogmatic interpretations, personal names, anthropomorphic conceptions and salaried priests, the fundamental doctrines of all religion will be proved identical in their esoteric meaning. Osiris, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, will be shown as different names for one and the same royal highway to final bliss, Nirvana.

Mystical Christianity, that is to say that Christianity which teaches self-redemption through our own seventh principle—this liberated Para-Atma (Augoeides) called by some Christ, by others Buddha, and equivalent to regeneration or rebirth in spirit—will be found just the same truth as the Nirvana of Buddhism. All of us have to get rid of our own Ego, the illusory apparent *self*, to recognize our true self in a transcendental divine life. But if we would not be selfish, we must strive to make other people see that truth, to recognize the reality of that transcendental self, the Buddha, the Christ or God of every preacher. This is why even exoteric Buddhism is the surest path to lead men towards the one esoteric truth.

As we find the world now, whether Christian, Mussulman or Pagan, justice is disregarded and honour and mercy both flung to the winds. In a word, how, seeing that the main objects of the T. S. are misinterpreted by those who are most willing to serve us personally, are we to deal with the rest of mankind, with the curse known as the 'struggle for life', which is the real and most prolific parent of most woes and sorrows and all crimes? Why has that struggle become the almost universal scheme of the universe? We answer, because no religion, with the exception of Buddhism, has hitherto taught a practical contempt for this earthly life, while each of them, always with that one solitary exception, has through its hells and damnations inculcated the greatest dread of death. Therefore do we find that struggle for life raging most fiercely in Christian countries, most prevalent in Europe and America. It weakens in the Pagan lands, and is nearly unknown among Buddhist populations. (In China during famine and where the masses are most ignorant of their own or any religion, it was remarked that those mothers who devoured their children belonged to localities where there were the most Christian missionaries to be found; where there were none, and the Bonzes alone had the field, the population died with the utmost indifference.) Teach the people to see that life on this earth even the happiest is but a burden and an illusion, that it is but our

own *karma*, the cause producing the effect, that is our own judge, our saviour in future lives, and the great struggle for life will soon lose its intensity. There are no penitentiaries in Buddhist lands, and crime is nearly unknown among the Buddhist Thibetans. (The above is not addressed to you, i.e., A.P.S., and has naught to do with the work of the Simla Eclectic Society. It is meant only as an answer to the erroneous impression in Mr Hume's mind of the 'Ceylon work' as no theosophy.)

The world in general, the Christendom especially, left for two thousand years to the regime of a personal God, as well as its political and social systems based on that idea, has now proved a failure. If the Theosophists say: 'We have nothing to do with all this; the lower classes and the inferior races (those of India for instance, in the conception of the British) cannot concern us and must manage as they can,' what becomes of our fine professions of benevolence, philanthropy, reform, etc.? Are these professions a mockery? And if a mockery, can ours be the true path? Shall we not devote ourselves to teaching a few Europeans, fed on the fat of the land. many of them loaded with the gifts of blind fortune, the rationale of bell-ringing, cup-growing, of the spiritual telephone and astral body formations, and leave the teeming millions of the ignorant, of the poor and despised, the lowly and the oppressed, to take care of themselves and of their hereafter as best they know how? Never. Rather perish the T.S. with both its hapless founders than that we should permit it to become no better than an academy of magic, a hall of occultism. That we the devoted followers of that spirit incarnate of absolute self-sacrifice, of philanthropy, divine kindness, as of all the highest virtues attainable on this earth of sorrow, the man of men, Gautama Buddha, should ever allow the T.S. to represent the *embodiment of selfishness*, the refuge of the few with no thought in them for the many, is a strange idea, my brothers.

Among the few glimpses obtained by Europeans of Thibet and its mystical hierarchy of 'perfect Lamas', there is one which was correctly understood and described. 'The incarnations of the Bodhisattva, Padma Pani, or Avalokitesvara and of Tsong-ka-pa and that of Amitabha, relinquish at their death the attainment of Buddhahood — i.e., the *summum bonum* of bliss and of individual personal felicity—that they might be born again and again for the benefit of mankind.' (R.D.) (Rhys Davids.) In other words, that they might be again and again subjected to misery, imprisonment in flesh, and all the sorrows of life, provided that by such a self-sacrifice, repeated throughout long and dreary centuries, they might become the means of securing salvation and bliss in the hereafter for a handful of men chosen among but one of the many races of mankind. And it is we, the humble disciples of these perfect Lamas, who are expected to allow the T.S. to drop its noble title, that of Brotherhood of Humanity, to become a simple school of psychology. No, no, good brother, you have been labouring under the mistake too long already. Let us understand each other. He who does not feel competent enough to grasp the noble idea sufficiently, to work for it, need not undertake a task too heavy for him. But there is hardly a Theosophist in the whole Society unable to effectually help it by correcting the erroneous impressions of the outsiders, if not by actually propagating himself this idea. Oh, for the noble and unselfish man to help us *effectually* in India in that divine task! All our knowledge, past and present, would not be sufficient to repay him.

Having explained our views and aspirations, I have but a few words more to add. To be true, religion and philosophy must offer the solution of every problem. That the

world is in such a bad condition morally is a conclusive evidence that none of its religions and philosophies, those of the *civilized* races less than any other, have ever possessed the *truth*. The right and logical explanations on the subject of the problems of the great dual principles—right and wrong, good and evil, liberty and despotism, pain and pleasure, egotism and altruism—are as impossible to them now as they were 1881 years ago. They are as far from the solution as they ever were; but to these there must be somewhere a consistent solution, and if our doctrines prove their competence to offer it, then the world will be quick to confess *that* must be the true philosophy, the true religion, the true light, which gives *truth* and nothing but the truth.

Notes to Letter (by C. Jinarâjadâsa, 1945)

This is certainly the most important letter ever received from the adept teachers, as it is a communication from the Maha Chohan ('to whose insight the future lies like an open page'—K.H., Letter 16), one of the three great Adepts who form the 'triangle' of the great Hierarchy. As the note from the Master K.H. says, the communication is not a letter written by the Maha Chohan himself, but the report of an interview. To understand its full significance, we must enter into the Theosophical situation in 1881. Communications by way of precipitated letters had begun to come to Mr A.P. Sinnett in October 1881 (1880?) at Allahabad; the next principal person in the Allahabad group was Mr A.O. Hume who joined the Society in 1881 (1880?). The former was editor of *The Pioneer*, the English daily which was practically the mouthpiece of the British Government; the latter was a high official in its service.

Both these Englishmen were in close touch with the scientific ideas then prevalent in England; neither was religious nor had any leaning towards mysticism. Both were 'very British' with a veiled antipathy towards the darker-skinned Aryans among whom their lot was temporarily cast. Mr Sinnett was proud by race, but Mr Hume was proud with the overweening pride of a fancied superior intellect. The former had not the faintest idea of what was meant by metaphysics or philosophy, he was intensely objective and fascinated by all scientific experiments; the latter was an ornithologist and had a hobby of collecting the skins of rare birds, and some knowledge of metaphysical thought. Both these Englishmen were drawn to Theosophy; but what characterized Mr Sinnett was a steadily growing attachment to the Master K.H.—whom he presently termed his 'Guardian'—evidently an attachment brought from past lives. But neither at the time realized who or what the Adepts were, nor did the Adepts reveal themselves in their full nature and powers, but merely as philosophical instructors, who could on occasion perform certain 'phenomena'. Some of these are related in Mr Sinnett's work, *The Occult World*.

But above all things, what characterized these two Englishmen, neither of them of the highest scientific or philosophical attainments, was the profound conviction that they knew the western world far better than the Adepts. When the Adepts proclaimed the true significance of their attempt to influence the world through the Theosophical Society, which was to mould the world towards a larger and truer sense of brotherhood than the religions had so far accomplished, these two plainly informed the Adepts that there was no future at all for the theosophical movement in the West along that line.

The only way to convince the thoughtful minds of the West, that the ideas of the Adepts were worth examining, was *first* to perform certain phenomena under perfect 'test conditions'. European scientists of the type of Huxley, Tyndall, Darwin and others would then be ready to examine the theosophical thesis concerning life and evolution. As to the Society's first Object of establishing a universal brotherhood, Mr Sinnett and Mr Hume said that Christianity had been trying to proclaim brotherhood for 1880 years, with no success whatsoever; why dissipate the energy of Theosophists, who desired to serve the Adepts, along that futile line? The only effective way to convince the West that the Adepts had something to teach was by performing, for instance, such a phenomenon as that of bringing the London *Times* of a particular date to Simla on the same day, a journey which usually took twenty-one days by steamer and rail.

Again and again Mr Sinnett and Mr Hume harped on this thesis. In spite of all the teachings received by him, Mr Sinnett never to the end of his life changed from his standpoint, for long years after all communication ceased between the Master K.H. and himself, he wrote:

The true work of a Theosophist is to promote spiritual progress. This is a higher task than even the promoting of Brotherhood—which is, after all, the elementary teaching both of Theosophy and Christianity.

Mr Sinnett and Mr Hume again and again insisted that they knew the world (meaning England) better than the Adepts, and continued to attempt to instruct the Adepts as to what they should do, if they desired the theosophical movement to become a success. So tiresome were they in their insistence that on a certain occasion the Master M. wrote to Mr Sinnett as follows:

A few days before leaving us, Koot Hoomi speaking of you said to me as follows, 'I feel tired and weary of these never ending disputations. The more I try to explain to both of them the circumstances that control us and that interpose between us so many obstacles to free intercourse, the less they understand me! Under the most favourable aspects this correspondence must always be unsatisfactory, even exasperatingly so, at times; for nothing short of personal interviews, at which there could be discussion and the instant solution of intellectual difficulties as they arise, would satisfy them fully. It is as though we were hallooing to each other across an impassable ravine and only one of us seeing his interlocutor. In point of fact, there is nowhere in physical nature a mountain abyss so hopelessly impassable and obstructive to the traveller as that spiritual one, which keeps them back from me' (*The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*, Letter 29).

A quite characteristic example of the attitude of even Mr Sinnett to the Adepts was a letter he wrote to the Master about this very Letter XXIX, that the Master should *rewrite* it, leaving out certain parts of it, since the letter as it was would not at all have the effect on Mr Hume which the Master desired.

It was only with the permission of the Maha Chohan that communications to Mr Sinnett and Mr Hume, through letters and phenomena, had begun, and as neither of them seemed amenable to reason, at last the Master K.H. approached the Maha Chohan.

We have this communication which I have placed as Letter 1, for it is practically the charter for the work and development of the Theosophical Society throughout the ages.

One of the strangest elements in this episode is that the original of this letter to Mr Sinnett from the Master K.H., recording the observations of the Maha Chohan, is nowhere to be found. It is not published in *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*. But fortunately for us, copies were made, under instructions from the two Masters, of such parts of their communications to Mr Sinnett and Mr Hume as were instructional in their nature, and which gave an idea of the esoteric philosophy. This first letter was copied and cyclostyled in London, and sent to certain selected persons. One such copy is among the papers of C.W. Leadbeater, and I published the letter from it in my edition of 1919. This year, 1945, when our archives, which had been evacuated out of Madras owing to the war, were back again at Adyar, I found a manuscript volume, in the handwriting of Miss Francesca Arundale, which contained, among other extracts from the letters, this Letter 1. I have recopied the letter from these two manuscripts.

H.P.B. of course knew of this letter and evidently had a copy, for she quotes extracts here and there from it (with slight changes, for publication to the public, I presume), with the following note:

But another letter was written, also in 1880¹ which is not only a direct reproof to the Theosophists who neglect the main idea of Brotherhood, but also an anticipated answer to M. Émile Burnouf's chief argument. Here are a few extracts from it. It was addressed again to those who sought to make away with the 'sentimental title', and make of the Society but an arena for 'cup-growing and astral bell-ringing' (*Lucifer*, Vol. II, August 1888, pp. 431-32).

H.P.B. also quoted from this letter in her first statement issued in 1888 to the members of the newly formed E.S.T.

In Letter 33 the Master refers to this letter when he says:

Those greater than we have said that he who thinks the task of working for others too hard had better not undertake it.

In the issue for February 1893, of *The Path*, edited by W.Q. Judge in New York, three paragraphs from the letter are quoted; as also Letters 32 and 33 in this work. The article in *The Path*, in which the three parts of Letter 1 of the Maha Chohan are quoted, is signed, 'One of the Recipients'. I can only presume that Mr Judge did not know that the recipient was Mr Sinnett, as the words of the Master to Mr Sinnett, 'My own letter, the answer to yours, will shortly follow. K.H.', are not in the cyclostyled copy which, I presume, is what Mr Judge had before him.

Dr Besant, in September 1907, in her first address to the Society as President, refers to the parts of this letter quoted in *The Path* mentioned above.

In the letter which Dr Annie Besant received in 1900 (Letter 59) the Master K.H., referring to Letter 1, says:

¹ H.P.B. omitted to note that the Letter says in the sentence but one '1881 years ago'.

The Theosophical Society was meant to be the corner-stone of the future religions of humanity.

Mr Sinnett worked for Theosophy right to the end with his many books and constant lectures; he was twice Vice-President of the Society. But he held throughout that the work of Theosophists was directed to mistaken objectives by both Presidents, H.S. Olcott and Annie Besant, and he was critical of the activities of both. Mr Hume left the Society in 1884. Nevertheless, so strong was the awakening he had undergone in his best nature under the influence of the Adepts, that he accomplished one of the great objectives of the Adepts—the awakening of India from her position of servile acquiescence in the British administration. It was Mr Hume, after he retired from Government service, who was the prime mover and inspirer in creating the now famous Indian National Congress, and he has rightly earned the name of Father of the Congress.

Additional Note re the Maha Chohan Letter (by editor, 1963)

Recently it was discovered that the letter from the Maha Chohan appears in H.P.B.'s scrap-book, No. XXIII, Part II, (page 469), as a cutting from the American *Religio-Philosophical Journal* of 26 June 1886, in a letter addressed to the editor with the following heading:

Several Good Reasons

Given to 'R.H.' by the Chohan Why the
Theosophical Society should be a
Brotherhood of Humanity.

At the end of the letter there is the following note:

The above is an abridged version of the views of the Chohan on the Theosophical Society from his own words, as given last night through an accredited chela, and now published for the benefit of those whom it may concern.

In the final paragraph, where Mr C. Jinarajadasa gives the date as 1880 (1881), the cutting distinctly gives the date as 1886. The two versions are practically the same except for a few minor differences in punctuation and words, but the American paper omit the references to 'Christian missionaries', to A.P.S., the Eclectic Society and Mr Hume, and to India.

Adyar, 1963.

Publisher