HPB in Tibet
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Among the many mysteries in H.P. Blavatsky’s (HPB) life the central one is who she really was. Scholars of different persuasions have referred to her as an adventurous traveller, a strong-willed woman, a Russian writer who dabbled in the ‘occult’, a psychic and a medium, plus much less kind descriptions. A multifaceted life like hers provoked equally different perceptions of her, who indeed was a strongly independent woman travelling around the world, sometimes to forbidden places like Tibet.

But it is her Teachers’ description of her that really matters in order to understand her real work in the world: the herald for the rebirth of the Esoteric Tradition in the western world. For them she was **Upasika**, an initiated Chela.

Even in her own play with the word attention, followers, today’s world it has corporate logo that is aggrandizing individuals themselves a ‘spiritual’ selling the message that ‘Guru/Initiate/Avatar’ summit of spiritual that all we have to do is for a price.

Unlike such undertook, voluntarily, complete self-sacrifice in order to prepare herself to the work that was assigned to her by the Masters. In doing so she attracted the world’s contempt and opposition, she had to face betrayal and ignominy, and was the subject of a relentless campaign of character-assassination and malice. For a profoundly spiritually sensitive individual, who underwent a serious process of inner, spiritual transformation, to be at the receiving end of the world’s vilest currents must have been an unspeakable ordeal.

The passages below present, sometimes in detail, the unique process that HPB went through. It goes without saying that only a highly resourceful individual would have been able to face it like she did, without any allurement of personal gain whatsoever.

Below is the Mahatmas description of the challenging process that leads a candidate to the state of Chelaship, which HPB achieved:
Every human being contains within himself vast potentialities, and it is the duty of the adepts to surround the would-be chela with circumstances which shall enable him to take the “right-hand path,” — if he have the ability in him. We are no more at liberty to withhold the chance from a postulant than we are to guide and direct him into the proper course. At best, we can only show him after his probation period was successfully terminated — that if he does this he will go right; if the other, wrong. But until he has passed that period, we leave him to fight out his battles as best he may; and have to do so occasionally with higher and initiated chelas such as H.P.B., once they are allowed to work in the world, that all of us more or less avoid.

*(The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett, Letter 92, chronological edition.)*

In the next passages Mahatma K.H. points out how the Adepts’ chiefs searched for a long time to find someone like HPB as well as how the formation of the TS was conceived by the Brotherhood of Adepts:

After nearly a century of fruitless search, our chiefs had to avail themselves of the only opportunity to send out a European body upon European soil to serve as a connecting link between that country and our own.

*(Letter 22, chronological edition)*

On the 17th of November next the Septenary term of trial given the Society at its foundation in which to discreetly “preach us” will expire. One or two of us hoped that the world had so far advanced intellectually, if not intuitionally, that the occult doctrine might gain an intellectual acceptance, and the impulse given for a new cycle of occult research. Others — wiser as it would now seem — held differently, but consent was given for the trial. It was stipulated, however, that the experiment should be made independently of our personal management; that there should be no abnormal interference by ourselves. So casting about we found in America the man to stand as leader — a man of great moral courage, unselfish, and having other good qualities. He was far from being the best, but (as Mr. Hume speaks in HPB's case) — he was the best one available. With him we associated a woman of most exceptional and wonderful endowments. Combined with them she had strong personal defects, but just as she was, there was no second to her living fit for this work. We sent her to America, brought them together — and the trial began.

*(Letter 45, chronological edition)*

The above mentioned passages strongly imply that the success of the new venture – the Theosophical Society and the dissemination of Theosophy – was based in no small measure on HPB’s occult training in Tibet. It becomes apparent that such training could not be conducted in any other country but required her physical presence in that secluded country where her Teachers lived.

Geoffrey Barborka, in his insightful book *H.P. Blavatsky, Tibet and Tulku* (Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1966) presents important evidence not only of her travels to Tibet but also some passing glimpses of the inner training she was undergoing under the direction of the Mahatmas. Barborka quotes the following letter from HPB to A.P. Sinnett:
“I say . . . to the world: ‘Ladies and gentlemen, I am in your hands and subject and subordinate to the world's jury, only since I founded the T.S. Between H. P. Blavatsky from 1875 and H.P.B. from 1830 to that date, is a veil drawn and you are in no was concerned with what took place behind it, before I appeared as a public character ....’”

“. . . The whole of my life except the weeks and months I passed with the Masters in Egypt or in Tibet, is so inextricably full of events with whose secrets and real actuality the dead and the living are concerned, and I made only responsible for their outward appearance...” (op. cit. p. 116)

In the next passage, HPB replies to a critic, Arthur Lillie, regarding her travels in Tibet:

“I will tell him [Arthur Lillie] also that I have lived at different periods in Little Tibet as in Great Tibet, combined more than seven years. Yet, I have never stated verbally or over my signature that I had passed seven consecutive years in a convent. What I have said, and repeat now, is, that I have visited Tashi-lhunpo and its neighbourhood, and that I have been further in, and in such places of Tibet as have never been visited by any other European, and that he can ever hope to visit.” (op. cit. p. 121)

In the same reply to Lillie, HPB recounts having met her Teachers near the border of Tibet:

“Only years back, as I can prove by numerous witnesses, when journeying from Chandernagor to Darjeeling, instead of proceeding to it direct, I left the train half way, was met by friends with a conveyance, and passed with them into the territory of Sikkim, where I found my Master and Mahatma Koot Hoomi. Thence five miles across the old borderland of Tibet.” (op. cit., p. 123)

In a letter to Sinnett, HPB recalls a brief but significant visit to her Teachers’ Ashrama:

The fact is that had I not left Bombay in the greatest secrecy — even some Theosophists who visit us believing me at home but busy and invisible as usual — had I not gone incognito so to say till I reached the hills and turned off the railway to enter Sikkim I
would have never been allowed to enter it unmolested, and would not have seen M. and K. H. in their bodies both. Lord, I would have been dead by this time. Oh the blessed blessed two days! It was like the old times when the bear paid me a visit. The same kind of wooden hut, a box divided into three compartments for rooms, and standing in a jungle on four pelican’s legs; the same yellow chelas gliding noiselessly; the same eternal “gul-gul-gul” sound of my Boss’s inextinguishable chelum pipe; the old familiar sweet voice of your K. H. (whose voice is still sweeter and face still thinner and more transparent) the same entourage for furniture — skins, and yak-tail stuffed pillows and dishes for salt tea etc.


The passage below, from Personal Memoirs of H. P. Blavatsky by Mary K. Neff (London: Rider & Co. Paternoster House, E.C., 1937) refers to one of the periods of spiritual training that HPB underwent in Tibet, with her Masters:

In the Master’s Ashrama at Last

Of H.P.B.’s life in the home of her Master, we catch but few glimpses. One of the most intimate of these is contained in the following reminiscence written by her in 1886: “I was again (a scene of years back) in Mahatma K. H.’s house. I was sitting in a corner on a mat, and he was walking about the room in his riding dress, and Master [M.] was talking to someone behind the door.

“ ‘I remind can’t’ — I pronounced in answer to a question of His about a dead aunt. He smiled and said: ‘Funny English you use.’ Then I felt vanity, and (mind you, in which was the of what had word sixteen am here and English in language, I can speak better “To make it also used whether bad or for Him, as He does not speak it but understands every word I say out of my head, and I am made to understand Him — how I could never tell or explain if I were killed but I do. With D.(jwal) K.(ul) I also speak English, he speaking it better even than Mah. K. H.

“Then in my dream still, three months after, as I was made to feel in that vision — I was standing before Mah. K. H., near the old building taken down He was looking at; and as Master was not at home, I took to Him a few sentences I was studying in Senzar in His sister’s room, and asked Him to tell me if I had translated them correctly and gave Him a slip of paper with these sentences written in English.
“He took and read them, and correcting the interpretation read them over, and said: ‘Now your English is becoming better. Try to pick out of my head even the little I know of it’. And He put His hand on my forehead in the region of memory and squeezed His fingers on it (and I felt even the same trifling pain in it as then, and the cold shiver I had experienced); and since that day He did so with my head daily, for about two months.

“Again the scene changes, and I am going away with Master who is sending me off back to Europe. I am bidding good-bye to His sister and her child, and all the chelas. I listen to what the Masters tell me. And then come the parting words of Mah. K. H., laughing at me as He always did …” (p. 147)

In the following passage of a letter from Mahatma K.H. to both A.P. Sinnett and A.O. Hume, an attempt is made by the Master to explain one of the mysteries of HPB’s personality, which was at times misunderstood by both English gentlemen:

“I am painfully aware of the fact that the habitual incoherence of her statements—especially when excited—and her strange ways make her in your opinion a very undesirable transmitter of our messages. Nevertheless, kind Brothers, once that you have learned the truth; once told, that this unbalanced mind, the seeming incongruity of her speeches and ideas, her nervous excitement, all that in short, which is so calculated to upset the feelings of sober minded people, whose notions of reserve and manners are shocked by such strange outbursts of what they regard as her temper, and which so revolt you,—once nothing of it is hers, you may, to regard her in light. that the time is let you entirely and that you prepared to great Mystery, owing to the and wrong empowered to glimpse behind the veil. This state of hers is intimately connected with her occult training in Tibet, and due to her being sent out alone into the world to gradually prepare the way for others. After nearly a century of fruitless search, our chiefs had to avail themselves of the only opportunity to send out a European body upon European soil to serve as a connecting link between that country and our own. You do not understand? Of course not. Please then, remember, what she tried to explain, and what you gathered tolerably well from her, namely the fact of the seven principles in the complete human being. Now, no man or woman, unless he be an initiate of the ‘fifth circle,’ can leave the precincts of Bod-Las [Tibet] return back into the world in his integral whole—if I may use the expression. One, at least of his seven satellites has to remain behind for two reasons: the first to form the necessary connecting link, the wire transmission—the second as the safest warranter that certain things will never be divulged. She is no exception to the rule, and you have
seen another exemplar—a highly intellectual man—who had to leave one of his skins behind; hence, is considered highly eccentric. The bearing and status of the remaining six depend upon the inherent qualities, the especially upon the idiosyncracies transmitted by what modern science call, atavism. Acting in accordance with my wishes, my brother M. made to you through her a certain offer, if you remember. You had but to accept it, and at any time you liked, you would have had for an hour or more, the real batchooly to converse with, instead the psychological cripple you generally have to deal with now.”

(The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett, Letter 22, chronological edition.)

HPB knew, much before she published The Voice of the Silence in 1889, one of the cardinal truths of the spiritual Path: ‘Nay, O thou candidate for Nature’s hidden lore! If one would follow in the steps of holy Tathāgata, those gifts and powers are not for Self.’ (Fragment Three) In a world that daily glorifies selfishness and self-centredness her example shines like a star in a profoundly dark sky. Her example becomes itself a teaching: forget self in the service of all that lives.

When she lay dying in her house in London, in May 1891, her last words to Isabel Cooper-Oakley were: “Keep the link unbroken! Do not let my last incarnation be a failure.” She was the living link with the world of the Adepts, the Masters of the Wisdom and Compassion, a world of perfect altruism, of peace and renunciation of everything that pertains to self. Cynics maintained that the link was broken on her death. But they failed to see that it continued to be alive in every theosophist that continued to aspire to be of service, to probe deeper, to cleanse their hearts, to purify their minds, to forget themselves. The link is a spiritual revolution that cannot be stopped.

The link with the Wise Ones, which HPB embodied, did not die. It illumined many lives, it comforted many souls and energized a global movement. She lives amongst us as the soul of Theosophy made practical.