

The Mahatmas and the TS

Pedro Oliveira

Sometimes the following questions are asked: ‘Now that there are so many spiritual and esoteric organizations in the world, don’t you think that the TS has completed its work? Now that the Society has helped to disseminate Theosophy for well over a century, is it not time for it to retire?’ Some questioners even point out that there are much more ‘modern’ and ‘fresher’ spiritual messages today, by a number of teachers, which supersede the message of the TS. It becomes evident that, for them, the TS has become ‘old hat’.

There are others who say that since there is no recent evidence of communications with the Masters within it, they may have ‘discarded’ the Society. This reminds me of an answer given by our current International President to a Brazilian journalist, during a press conference which took place before the World Congress of the TS, held in Brasilia, in July 1993. Mentioning *Old Diary Leaves* by Col. Olcott, he said that there was documented evidence of contacts between the Founders and the Mahatmas. His question, which he addressed to Mrs Burnier, was: ‘What is the nature of the communication of present day TS leaders and the Masters? And what is the nature of *your* communication with them?’ A few moments of silence followed, after which the President said: ‘Let us suppose there is a couple for whom their relationship is considered as sacred. Would they talk about it in public? The relationship with a Master is much more sacred than that and therefore one does not talk about it.’ The silence that ensued marked the end of the press conference.

The Mahatmas offered some degree of guidance to the Founders, and to some other individuals, in the difficult beginnings of the Society. However, they made it very clear that they never intended to run it. And when one examines some of their letters, the nature of the guidance given in the 1880s remains as vitally valid today as when it was first given. Today, more than 130 years since the first communications were received, it is still worthwhile considering some of their statements about the nature of the TS and its work. For although the world has changed outwardly since that time, the essential features of the human mind have not. Although contemporary people are sailing a sea of information and instantaneous communication, the overwhelming majority seems to lack a genuine spiritual compass.

(Excerpts from letters quoted below are taken from *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom* and *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*.)

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.

It should not come as a surprise to its members that the Society, as inspired by the Mahatma's altruistic spirit, cannot base its work on attitudes that are the glorification of the personal self. One of the sources of vitality of the TS has been the encouragement of differences in viewpoint while carrying out a harmonious and cooperative collective work. For this reason, those who solely seek self-promotion within it are bound, sooner or later, to meet with disappointment, as well as those who eventually seem to insist that it should offer psychic training practices and development. The Society offers opportunities for one to study psychic phenomena and understand their mechanism, both from Madame Blavatsky and the Mahatmas, and many other authors in the Society, the distinction between psychism and spirituality has been made amply clear. Without the light of spiritual insight, psychic development tends to lead the practitioner astray.

To be true, religion and philosophy must offer the solution of every problem. That the world is in such a bad condition morally is conclusive evidence that none of its religions and philosophies, those of the *civilized* races less than any other, have ever possessed the *truth*.

The essence of religion is a state of complete and irreversible harmony with the Ground of Being, the Timeless Reality, and philosophy, at its best, is a clear and steady movement towards wisdom, a spiritually-transformed perception of the world. If such conditions exist, they can meet every problem and offer real solutions. Alas, religion has become a platform for exclusion, fear-mongering, violence and murder, in other words, a source of evil in the world. And philosophy, as in the words of Will Durant, when he referred to the speculative thinker, seems to be the domain of those who know more and more of less and less. The well-known Indian scholar, T.R.V. Murti, once remarked that he had never met a philosopher who was interested in Truth!

The TS includes both religion and philosophy, as well as science, in its field of study and exploration. But such study is meant to be at the service of the first and most important of its Objects, namely, Universal Brotherhood without distinction. In doing so the Society seeks to integrate the best of the ancient traditions of India, Persia, Tibet, China and so on, with the lofty philosophical schools in the Western world. The second Object can be seen as a space for dialogue between traditions with a view of realizing the essential oneness of humankind.

The pendulum has swung from the extreme of blind faith towards the extreme materialistic skepticism, and nothing can stop it save Theosophy. Is not this a thing worth working for, to save those nations from the doom their ignorance is preparing for them?

A crude representation of scientific materialism of the nineteenth century was given by Pierre Cabanis, French physiologist (1802): 'The brain secretes thought like the liver secretes bile.' The materialist world view has in it an inbuilt mechanist assumption that only matter exists. However, the very concept of matter has undergone change in the last two hundred years and some scientists have questioned the orthodox materialistic stance. Today, materialism exists in a much more sophisticated way as it has a very powerful ally: advertisement. One of its mantra-s is 'you can have more'. Following this principle, thousands of new gadgets enter the market on a regular basis, for modern materialism also works with another important factor: obsolescence. We are being continuously encouraged through television, magazines and websites to get a new car, a new mobile phone, a new house, and sometimes also a new body!

As a result of this frenzy for the 'new', natural resources are being destroyed at an appalling pace. No wonder that the Mahatma used the word 'extreme' in his reference to materialism. The Society also exists to try and stop it, not by preventing people from using gadgets, but by presenting to them the larger view of life which a Theosophical understanding gives.

... you have the making of your own future, in your own hands ... and every day you may be weaving its woof. If I were to demand that you should do one thing or the other, instead of simply advising, I would be responsible for every effect that might flow from the step and you acquire but a secondary merit.

The above is an extract of a reply from Master K.H. to C. W. Leadbeater when the latter had offered to become his chela (disciple). One of the fundamental principles along which the Masters seem to work is given in it: 'you have the making of your own future, in your own hands'. So unlike 'modern' gurus and teachers that tend to create a sense of dependence in their students or followers, the Master very clearly pointed out to CWL the core principle of self-responsibility. And the teachings of Theosophy, in what concerns human evolution, highlight the same principle: it is only when I cease to depend on external circumstances that I can truly grow. Self-observation and self-awareness become practical expressions of this important principle.

Selfishness and the want of self-sacrifice are the greatest impediments on the path of adeptship.

The sense of 'I'-ness is developed along the vast expanse of the evolutionary process. It initially can be seen as an instinct of protection against an aggressive external environment. As the mind principle develops and gets stronger self-interest settles in and starts to govern most of our activities. However, self-interest, in its essence, is a process of isolation and conflict, either covert or overt. It remains to this day one of the major causes in the collapse of relationships and the lack of mental clarity and wholeness. However, when the spiritual path is approached, self-interest becomes a danger and a serious impediment. The following is an excerpt from a letter from HPB to C.W. Leadbeater, written from Ostende in 1886, about a chela, Bawajee, who had gone with her to Europe to help in the work, but who later on turned against her and the Society:

Moreover, he has slandered persistently Subba Row, Damodar, Olcott and everyone at Adyar. He made many Europeans lose confidence in them. Subba Row, he says, never said a truth in his life to a European; he bamboozles them always and is a liar; Damodar is a great liar also; he alone (Bawajee) knows the Masters, and what They are. In short, he makes of our Mahatmas inaccessible, impersonal Beings, so far away that no one can reach Them!!! At the same time he contradicts himself: to one he says he was 10 y. [years] with Mahatma K.H.; to another 3 years, again he went several times to Tibet and saw the Master only from afar when he entered and came out of the temple. He lies most awfully. The truth is that he (B.) has never been to Tibet and has never seen his Master 100 miles off. NOW, I have the assurance of it from my Master Himself. He was a chela on probation. When he came to Bombay to the Headquarters, your Master ordered me to tell all He accepted Krishnaswami, and had sent him to live with us and work for the T.S.

The spiritual path is not for the fainthearted, nor for those who refuse to look at the unsuspected motives that drive their actions. As Brother Sri Ram aptly pointed out, the treading of the Path implies turning oneself inside out, so that one can observe and see for oneself what one's hidden motives and attitudes really are. If such fundamental honesty is not there one may, in all likelihood, become another wreck on the Path.

... the chief object of the T.S. is not so much to gratify individual aspirations as to serve our fellow men; and the real value of this term "selfish", which may jar upon your ear, has a peculiar significance with us which it cannot have with you; therefore, and to begin with, you must not accept it otherwise than in the former sense. Perhaps you will better appreciate our meaning when told that in our view the highest aspirations for the welfare of humanity become tainted with selfishness if, in the mind of the philanthropist, there lurks the shadow of desire for self benefit or a tendency to do injustice, even when these exist unconsciously to himself.

The Mahatmas, the Founders and their successors, pointed out that the Society, as a living entity, has Universal Brotherhood as its essential and perennial keynote. The TS was never meant to be an academic body, although a great deal of scholarly work has been produced within it. It was also not intended to be a 'hall of occultism' wherein occult or spiritual practices are taught systematically. It was neither conceived also as a philanthropic

organization along worldly lines, in which the self-interest of a few determines who gets benefited by its funds. The Mahatma's view of philanthropy is quite different for, as he points out, whenever there is desire for self-benefit or a tendency to do injustice, even when these exist unconsciously, the altruistic effort becomes tainted. Only a truly altruistic body can be in a condition to receive their influence and energizing help, for they – each one of them – live only to benefit humanity. Therefore any member who is earnest to help the TS must check the existence of selfish motives in themselves. This, however, is easier said than done.

Will you, or rather they, never see the true meaning and explanation of that great wreck and desolation which has come to our land and threatens all lands — yours first of all? It is *selfishness* and *exclusiveness* that killed ours, and it [is] *selfishness* and exclusiveness that will kill yours — which has in addition some other defects which I will not name. The world has clouded the light of true knowledge, and selfishness will not allow its resurrection, for it excludes and will not recognize the whole fellowship of all those who were born under the same immutable natural law.

Carl Gustav Jung suggested that there is a 'shadow' side in the human psyche, which is nourished by lack of attention, observation and reflection. It consists of the accumulation of that which has been repressed for a long time, including feelings, desires and personal ambition. In the contemporary world this aspect of the mind has become quite visible, for example, in the actions of those who promote war and violence in the name of religion. The unconscious desire for the supremacy of one's religion – or ideology – has turned the world into a much more dangerous place. Another aspect of the same problem is the craving for novelty, which betrays a deep-seated fear to face oneself as one is. Leisure can then become a routine of repeated escape from oneself. The end-result of such attitudes is selfishness and exclusiveness. The selfish mind creates for itself a customized world of illusory pursuits, which cuts itself off from the benign glory enshrined in every form of life.

The term "Universal Brotherhood" is no idle phrase. Humanity in the mass has a paramount claim upon us, as I try to explain in my letter to Mr. Hume, which you had better ask the loan of. It is the only secure foundation for universal morality. If it be a dream, it is at least a noble one for mankind: and it is the aspiration of the *true adept*.

Contrary to what many believe, the Society does not have an ideology of its own, was not formed to convince people of the reality of the teachings it made available to the world, neither to promise people a facile way of personal development. The very cornerstone of the TS is Universal Brotherhood without distinction, an essential affirmation of the profound oneness of human consciousness and destiny and thus the perennial basis for a timeless ethics which can completely change human relationships, as well as our relationship with Mother Earth. The one and only concern of the Mahatmas, expressed again and again in their correspondence, is with humanity, its suffering, its travails and its uplifting.

And now it is your province to decide which will you have: the highest philosophy or simple exhibitions of occult powers. Of course this is by far not the last word between us and — you will have time to think it over. The *Chiefs* want a “Brotherhood of Humanity”, a real Universal Fraternity started; an institution which would make itself known throughout the world and arrest the attention of the highest minds.

Both A. P. Sinnett and A. O. Hume, the recipients of letters from the Mahatmas, were convinced that the way to attract attention of people in general to the work of the TS was through continuous demonstrations of occult phenomena. Madame Blavatsky did oblige in this direction up to a point, but she was later told by her Teacher to cease from displays of such phenomena. The above well-known quotation contains reference to those in the Brotherhood of Adepts who belonged to a higher rank, and from them came the direct advice that the TS should be a Brotherhood of Humanity. It is equally interesting to note that the Mahatma seems to equate Brotherhood of Humanity with the highest philosophy, a possible indication that the first Object of the Society embodies in it the core esoteric principle of unity as a fundamental law of existence.

So, in spite of proclamations to the contrary, the Theosophical Society continues to have a meaningful work before it. Its essential message has not aged, nor has the Society become ‘old hat’. It may have problems like every institution which consists of human beings has. But any serious member who carefully examines the Objects, the purpose and the inner life of the Society cannot fail to see how important, relevant and urgent its work is for the world. Do the Masters still have an interest in it? Some may wish to speculate about this. However, one of them left a sobering message for those who aspire to understand their work: ‘How few are they who can know anything about us.’