

Messages from the Unseen

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I have received a number of letters lately from members of our Society in different parts of the world referring to spirit communications. It would seem that some of our brethren are really troubled about such matters, and scarcely know how to regard them; so it may be worthwhile to offer a few suggestions.

In the first place, we must try to realize that messages from the unseen world are quite common things. The person who receives a message of that sort usually feels himself to be specially favoured, and thinks that he alone out of all the world is selected for this very wonderful experience; and our spirit friends tend a little to encourage that idea. But really that is an illusion. It is not at all an uncommon thing for people to receive messages from the unseen, and therefore we need not attach undue importance to them. They come in many ways. In the old days they came most frequently through table-rapping, or table-tilting; that plan is less in fashion now, and people mostly receive them through writing by planchette.

Planchette is a little heart-shaped board which, when one or two people put their hands on it, will sometimes run about and write messages. Others receive communications through a contrivance which they call the Ouija Board. The name appears to be composed of two words - oui and ja, which are respectively the French and German words for yes. There are specimens of it which have inscribed upon them the words 'Yes' and 'No', and then the letters of the alphabet. There is a little stick which turns about and points to the letters, and in that way communications are given. Other people receive them through their own hands by what is called automatic writing. A person sits quietly with a pencil in his hand, the hand resting on a sheet of paper, and the pencil presently begins to scribble. Sometimes it writes nonsense or draws meaningless lines, but sometimes it writes quite intelligibly.

Do not make the mistake of thinking that such phenomena are always fraudulent or a delusion. They are not necessarily that at all. I myself have seen sentences in classical Greek written in that way with a planchette under the hand of an ignorant Sinhalese boy, who did not know the Greek alphabet even; yet intelligible sentences were written in the Greek language by the hand of that boy. Such a message is not a fraud; it is a genuine manifestation of its kind – a communication from the unseen world; but we must bear in mind that the unseen world is after all an extension of the world we see, and the advice that comes from there is not necessarily any wiser than that which we might receive on the physical plane. Sometimes those who give us these communications are sportive Nature-Spirits, though much more often they are dead people; but a man who happens to be dead is not therefore all-wise. His advice directly after death is worth precisely what it was worth just before death; we must not take everything for gospel which comes in any of these ways. Sometimes such an impression comes to a person through a dream or a vision. He may meet in his dream some noble-looking person in flowing robes, generally luminous and shining, and he may bring back a clear recollection of what he thinks that person said. That may be a real occurrence in the astral world, but on the other hand it may not; and even if it be, we must not conclude that what is said is necessarily wise or accurate.

A case came before me some time ago – a case of a person who was haunted and persecuted by a certain female figure who never left him, who was always talking to him, and telling him that he had

been Napoleon, Julius Caesar, Hiram Abiff, Cavour, St. Joseph and other great personages in his past incarnations. Furthermore she told him that she had seen round him various exalted beings, the Lord Buddha Himself among others!

Such a statement is typical and most significant. Any Theosophist should know in a moment what to say to a statement like this; he would feel that, on the face of it, it is ridiculous. No doubt it is so from one point of view, but from another it is a very pitiable thing, because here is a really good person, earnest and devoted, who has actually believed this nonsense for apparently quite a long time, and is only now, because the creature worries him and is perpetually talking to him, beginning to doubt about it and to ask for advice. It is a sad thing that any member of our Society should know so little as that about such matters, and it certainly behoves all of us to try to understand something of the conditions in that life on the other side, so that we may not be deluded.

If any person came to us on the physical plane and made such a statement, we should say to him: "You must be under an illusion. These incarnations do not cohere; there are evident discrepancies; the story is impossible." But the same person, or one at the same level, has only to speak or operate from the unseen side of life, and at once people fall down before him and accept anything he may say. Is that reasonable? I do not mean that we must reject all advice that comes to us in that way, but we must use our own common sense, and treat it exactly as we should advice given by a stranger on the physical plane. It may be good, or it may not. We must be careful about all these things; there is no need to be afraid of them, but obviously we must not trust in them blindly merely because they come from the unseen world.

There are perhaps more communications from the dead coming into the world now than at any previous period of history of which we know. That is largely due to the Great War. So many people who were killed in that war quite reasonably and legitimately tried to communicate with relations and friends in this world, and they to a certain extent introduced a fashion, or at least spread abroad much more widely a custom which had previously existed in a small way. Of course they were not in the least to be blamed for that, nor can we blame their living relatives for wishing to know what they have to say; but the fact remains that it is not wise to accept as gospel all that dead people tell us, even if we have definitely established the fact that those who are speaking are our own relations. It is well to make sure of this last fact, for there have been cases of personation. Also, we must remember that our dead friend or relative does not necessarily know the whole of the astral world. He will tell you, no doubt, various interesting things about his surroundings, about the condition which he finds. Many books have been published – some of them very-striking books – containing communications of that kind – Sir Oliver Lodge's *Raymond and Christopher*, for example, and quite a number of others.

Some of those communications contain many true statements, but these are often confused and intermingled with remarks which, if not actually inaccurate, are at least only locally applicable. It is just as if a visitor from another planet should suddenly arrive in this world. He might describe afterwards to his friends the place which he saw and the particular set of people who surrounded him, but he might be entirely ignorant of a hundred other parts of the world where conditions were very different; and if he judged the whole world from the one little place where he happened to come down, he might with the best intention give quite a wrong view of our earth. Even when we are sure that we are dealing with relations whom we know, we must still be cautious in accepting their impressions too readily, for they themselves may easily be deceived. They are living in a world where thought is all-powerful, and they see everything through the distorting glass of their own thoughts.

Even down here on the physical plane we often find that two people's descriptions of the same thing differ greatly. We may meet, let us say, two people living in the same neighbourhood, and we may enquire, with a view to settling there, what kind of a place it is. The account that each will give will be biased by his own particular experiences. One man may be looking, perhaps, for facilities for fishing. If there are no fish to be caught there, from his point of view the place is unsatisfactory, and he will speak unfavourably of it. Another will commend it because it is beautifully picturesque, or because he happens to have found there a house which suits him. Each man has a different point of view, and he decides that the whole neighbourhood is good or bad according to his personal predilection.

It is the same with the astral world. There are many subdivisions of it – not only the sub-planes about which we have read, but all sorts of local cliques and coteries. People in the astral world herd together just as they do on the physical plane, and although locomotion is much easier there, men naturally keep with those who have similar tastes. If you consult the dead about their religious beliefs, as people often do, they will nearly always tell you that the belief which they held on earth was largely justified, although as a rule they have widened out a little. Whether they were Catholics, Episcopalians or Dissenters on earth, they will most likely congregate with friends of the same point of view in that other world, and so they will have their own ideas confirmed. So it does not follow that we have a full and correct account of anything from the dead, any more than we should in talking to people on the physical plane, even though they may be perfectly honest in their opinions.

There are entities in that other world who think it amusing to make fun of enquirers; those are mostly of the Nature-Spirit type, and we are more likely to find them at public séances than at those which are private. Still, even when the communicating entities are what they pretend to be, it does not follow that they are all-wise, although many people have a tendency to think they are. We must exercise our judgment about it, and we must not be led astray by the fact that a given phenomenon or experience happened especially to us. That is always a danger; there is a sort of subtle flattery about it. Some creature comes to us and announces himself as a Master, as the Mahachohan, as the Archangel Michael or Gabriel, or whatever exalted name happens to occur to him, and he tells each man who listens to him that he, the listener, is the only person in the world who is sufficiently in sympathy with him (the Archangel) to be a suitable channel; and that therefore he (the Archangel) is going to make his auditor the instrument for a great work for the world. We of the Society are always looking for work to do, and we are quite right in that; but that very fact predisposes us to listen to this subtle form of flattery. We ought to know better than to be caught in so obvious a snare, but there are quite a number even of our members who will believe things spoken from the other side in a way which we should think the height of credulity down here; and the fact that so many of these astral communications are quite true, and agree with our Theosophical teaching, makes it all the more difficult for people to discriminate – to separate the statements which are worthy of attention from those which are not.

People in the other world often misunderstand its phenomena, just as ignorant people here misunderstand physical phenomena. For centuries the whole world (setting aside India and Egypt and possibly China, of whose condition at that time we do not know much), misunderstood the common solar phenomena, and supposed that the sun, the moon and the stars were all going round this particular insignificant speck of mud which we call earth. Now we know better, but it is only a very short time ago in the history of the world that the European nations at any rate discovered the truth. So they would have described all these matters quite wrongly if they had been asked about them by someone from another world. Just so, those who pass at death into the astral world often misunderstand the conditions around them; and then we in our turn often cannot understand the details

which they give us, even when they are correctly described. We can understand a plane fully only when we are able to rise above it and look down on it from above.

I think that those of you who may presently develop (as some of you have already done to some extent) the senses (it is one sense rather than many senses) by which we cognize the astral world, have a better chance of knowing the plane as a whole than the dead people who are confined to a small part of it. They are not confined in the sense that they are shut in, or that their movements are restricted, but that their lack of faculty restricts them. A person in the astral world can sense only that type of astral matter the vibrations of which he is able to receive, and because of the re-arrangement of this matter in his astral body after death, he is able to perceive only a small part of what is going on even close around him. If he is able to report to us, he will report that small part, and he will report it as if it were the whole, because that is all he knows ; so we must not take all that he says for gospel. We have a better chance ourselves of being able to gain a general idea of the astral world than the average dead man has.

I am not for a moment denying that sometimes useful information has been communicated from the unseen world. I have read in books of quite a number of valuable facts being given by dead people to the living; indeed, I happen to know personally of one or two such cases. For example, many years ago, when General Drayson and I were fellow-members of the London Lodge, he received from some dead astronomer an exceedingly valuable statement about what is called the second rotation of the earth. The demonstration which he was able to give of the truth of this motion was beyond any possible doubt, and he tried to put the case before the public. I must say he put it very badly, for he had not the gift of expression. He wrote some books about it which are so dull and technical that no one reads them, and that is a great pity, because a valuable fact is enshrined in them. He was able by means of this communication which he received to make astronomical calculations both forwards in time and backwards in time, far more accurately than they can be made by the ordinary methods. In certain cases one has to make unexplained allowances in order to bring the calculations to tally with the facts. In Drayson's system that is unnecessary, because it works out accurately, which is an absolute proof ; but no one would pay any attention to him because of the unfortunate way in which he put his statements. Still, there was a really useful scientific fact which came to us from that unseen world; no doubt some dead astronomer had discovered it, (for naturally scientific men continue their studies as far as they can in the next world), and he came across this fact and communicated it.

Also there was the case of the great philologist Terrien de la Couperie, who wrote a great deal about the Chinese. I understand that from the unseen world an important fact about their early history was conveyed to him. He was the first, so far as I know, to promulgate the idea that the Chinese nation arose originally from a colony coming from Bactria, which afterwards spread all over that part of the world. There was an important fact, and it is said that it was communicated in that way. So sometimes quite useful fragments of information have been given, but we must not assume that all information coming in that way is equally valuable; that simply is not so.

Another case is that of a book written by a certain Mr. Babbitt in America, called *The Principles of Light and Colour*. He is rather fantastic in many ways, but we find a number of statements in that book which are true, and I am told that he received them all in some way (I do not know in what way exactly), through spiritualistic influence, inspiration, or teaching. For one thing, he was the first man, so far as we know, to depict a physical ultimate atom. We find a drawing of it in his book which very closely corresponds to that which our President and I made nearly twenty years later. I think his book was published in 1878 or thereabouts, whereas our first attempt at occult chemistry was in 1895. You will see that his drawing of the atom is practically correct. There are a great many other statements

which he makes about it which we have not been able to verify so far. He represents atoms as actually touching one another, and in various ways he puts them into combinations which I should think from our own observation would be impossible. We find atoms always floating with a certain amount of space round them; but the fact remains that whoever communicated with him gave him the real shape of the atom as a kind of spiral, wire-like body.

It is not very likely that a scientific man carrying on his work in the higher world would communicate through the average medium. I do not mean anything disparaging when I say that the average medium is not as a rule a specially intellectual person. One who is very keenly intellectual would be unlikely to be a good medium, because the strong vibrations of the intellect would rather repel the astral vibrations. It is not actually the thoughts that would repel; but the corresponding vibrations which they would arouse in the astral world would be out of tune with those of the average medium, and consequently it is not likely that scientific facts of great importance will often be given through such a medium. The scientist could more readily make a mental impression upon some intellectual person who already knew something about his subject. Those of us who move about quite freely in the astral world presently come to be known there, and we are often accosted by people who have ideas which they wish to ventilate on the physical plane.

It is now just as in days of old. You remember the story of Dives and Lazarus in the Bible – how Dives said he wanted Lazarus sent back to his brethren to warn them, so that they might live differently. And the answer was: ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they ought to know all about it; why do not they read them?’ ‘Nay’, Dives said, ‘but if one came back from the dead they would listen to him.’ And the reply was: ‘If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe even though one rose from the dead.’ That is absolutely true. The man who is what we call dead knows the reality of that other life, and he feels: ‘If I had only known this before, how differently I should have lived’; and he expects that everyone will be influenced by what he says, forgetting that such communications have come to the world over and over again, and that very few people have taken warning thereby – forgetting even, perhaps, that he himself while on earth may have heard or read of such messages, and ridiculed the idea that they could possibly be true or important.

One needs to know the history of spiritual communications in order to be able to appreciate them at their right value. Mostly they are of that personal nature which I described, telling the recipient that he is a very great person, and that the spirits want to work through him. Sometimes they give very useful apophthegms; they are mostly of the copybook nature. ‘Be good and you will be happy’; ‘Evil communications corrupt good manners’; and so on. There is no harm in this, because people have read such things in their copybooks when they were children, and have promptly forgotten them. But apparently if a dead person writes such a maxim through the planchette, they take it as a personal message, and begin to take notice of it. I can only say: ‘If that is the only way in which it is possible to make people accept and live up to dicta of that sort, then let us have them written in that way by all means!’ [Spirits today, in order to carry more weight, do not claim to be angels or even Masters. Their latest fashion is to announce themselves as Mr. Krishnamurti, and in the Americas, as H.P.B. - C. Jinarajadasa]

But they so often go beyond the copybook apophthegm, and begin to give private personal advice. Mostly they mean well, I am sure; yet often it would not be wise to accept it; the recipient must exercise his own judgment, which is in all probability just as good as that of the dead man. After a man has been dead for twenty or thirty years, he ought to know more, but it does not follow that he does. Many people live here on the physical plane for fifty or sixty years, and learn remarkably little; so we cannot expect them to be much wiser now. We should listen to what they have to say and weigh

it, as we should weigh physical-plane advice; but we should not be unduly influenced because the man happens to be dead. And when they begin to flatter us, we had better beware. When they begin to tell us that we are the only persons in the world who can do this or that, it is time to be cautious. I know it is a fascinating idea to be told that one is the only channel in the whole world for the Mahachohan or for some great Power; but, you know, it has happened so often before! If only those to whom these things come would read the published literature on the subject, and so find out how many other great Beings have purported to communicate through very commonplace people, they would learn not to believe so easily.

We must remember that even members of the Theosophical Society are mostly still quite ordinary people! I mean that we are not distinguished beyond the rest of the world for our intellectual capacities; we are not more spiritual than many people in any one of the great religions. We shall find men just as spiritually minded, as unselfish and as devoted outside the Society as in it. We should be wise to take the advice given in that sentence in one of our books: 'Do not too soon begin to think yourself different from others.' Most of us are just ordinary, everyday specimens of the humanity of our time. That being so, why are we selected to receive this great revelation of Theosophy, singled out, as it were, by the Masters?

An outsider might say: 'But first of all, are you so chosen out? How do you know that?' We say (and we know what we are saying) that in the case of spiritualists, the spirits who communicate with them frequently do select high-sounding names to which they have no right. They pretend to be Julius Caesar, or Paracelsus, or Shakespeare, or any other great name in history which happens to occur to them. We know, those of us who have had experience in astral work, that such pretensions are common. Many spiritualists accept these extravagant claims; but the more advanced spiritualists do not. They know quite well that the assumption of great names is only a way to secure a hearing which otherwise such ordinary entities would not obtain. But spiritualists sometimes say to us, (I have had it said to me): 'But surely you Theosophists are in exactly the same position, except that the spirits who come to you pose as Mahatmas or Masters; how do you know that you are not being deluded by such a personation, exactly as the more ignorant among us have been deluded by personations of St. John the Divine or of the Blessed Virgin or of the Archangel Raphael?'

I suppose we are bound to admit that from their point of view there is such a possibility. But while that might perhaps with a certain show of reason be urged about some of our members who have had little or no personal experience, it does not impress itself as probable upon the older students. In my own case, it is forty-six years now since I first saw personally some of the Masters of the Wisdom. During all that time I have constantly been in communication with Them. Their speech and Their teaching have been among the facts of my daily life the whole time, and all that while what They have said and done has been entirely consistent with Themselves. I have been, though in the astral body, to Their houses. I have been in the physical body in the house of one of Them who lives in a more accessible place than most, and seen Him in the physical body. I have met another also in the physical body, and walked and talked with Him. If that is an illusion, then the whole of life is illusion as well.

Of course that is quite arguable; there are philosophers who hold that everything is illusion. We can only say that our knowledge of these Masters is just as much and just as little an illusion as our acquaintance with any of our members. I may be deluded when I think that I sit here and write, and you may be deluded when you think that you sit there and read what I have written. If that be so, the Masters may be part of the same illusion. But since that illusion has been absolutely coherent for so many years and has had nothing but a good effect in every way, since They have helped us in so many ways, since They have given us most valuable teaching, much of which we have learnt to corroborate

by our own investigations and by our own experiences – I say if that be an illusion, I do not object to it. But if there is anything at all in this world or any other which is real, then our Masters also are real, and our life in connection with Them is also real.

Their teaching is quite a different thing from the kind of communication which comes usually through spiritualism. Some of the highest spiritualistic teaching approaches it. I knew Mr. Stainton Moses in London long ago; he was the editor of *Light*, and was one of the most intellectual spiritualists I ever knew. He undoubtedly came into communication with some great person who taught him under the name of Imperator. The teaching which he gave was of a high character, and much of it was quite correct and very beautiful. That is often so with spiritualistic teaching, but unfortunately it is not all of that nature, so we must discriminate.

When the question is raised as to whether our Masters select us, I think we are justified in answering it in the affirmative; and since They do, and since we are nevertheless all ordinary people, it is obviously not for our gigantic intellect; it is not for our high spirituality; it is not for our pure unselfishness. All of us have something, I hope, of those characteristics, but there are undoubtedly people in the world who excel us along one or other of these lines, and yet who are not Theosophists. How is that? Why has this magnificent knowledge and the opportunity of knowing these great truths come to us and not to other people? It can be only because we have deserved it, for the world exists under a Divine Law of perfect justice. But how have we deserved it? It is not for our transcendent development along any line; then why is it?

We can say only this. Every man receives that which he has sought and has deserved. We see instances of that when we are able to look back along a line of lives. We may see a case of a person who has been deeply interested in art, but has had absolutely no opportunity of developing his own faculty in that line. He may have had a great love for drawing or painting, yet he himself may have been quite unable to draw or to paint. Such a man will receive the reward of his interest in art. It is more accurate to say that the force which he has put out in trying to understand and appreciate art, the amount of love of art which he has poured out, receives its result in the next life in faculty. He finds himself then able to draw or to paint with great facility; his desire has brought about its natural result in that next life.

If you apply that idea to your own case, I think we must suppose that we are all of us people who in a previous life, or perhaps in several previous births, have been interested in this inner side of life. We have sought to know and sought to understand, and as a result of such seeking we now find ourselves in a position to satisfy that wish.

There may be other contributory reasons. You may remember that in Oriental books we are told that there are four reasons, any one of which may bring a man to the commencement of the path of development. First, by being in the presence of, and coming to know, those who are already interested along that line. Suppose some of us were monks or nuns in the Middle Ages. We might have come into contact in that life with an abbot or an abbess who had deep experience of the inner world – a person like St. Theresa, for example. We might, looking up to that leader, have earnestly wished that such experiences should come to us; and our wishing for that might have been quite unselfish. It might be that we did not think of any importance that might come to us, or of the satisfaction of achievement, but simply of the joy of helping others, as we saw the abbot able to help others through his deeper discernment. Such a feeling would certainly bring us in the next incarnation into touch with teaching on the subject.

It happens that, in lands which have European culture, almost the only way in which we can have the inner teaching put clearly before us is by coming into the Theosophical Society, or by reading Theosophical works. There have been mystical and spiritualistic works which have given some information, which have gone a long way, but there are none (so far as I know) which state the case so clearly, so scientifically as the Theosophical books have done. I know of no other book which contains such a wealth of information as *The Secret Doctrine*. There are, of course, the sacred books of the Hindus and of other nations, and indeed there is a great deal in those sacred books, but it is not put in a way which makes it easy for us, with our training, to assimilate it or to appreciate it.

When, having read Theosophical books, we take up some of those beautiful translations of Oriental books, we can see our Theosophy in them. We may take the Christian Bible, though that is in many places not well translated from our point of view, and we shall find a great deal of Theosophy in that; but I have not discovered many Christians who have found out the Theosophical teaching from the Bible without any exterior help, because they do not know, when they take up the Bible without previous instruction, which of the texts are of real value from the Theosophical point of view and which are not. But when we have first learnt our Theosophy, we can at once point out what must be mistranslations. We should not have been able to comprehend much of that biblical teaching if we had not had the Theosophical instruction first. People have been reading the Bible for hundreds of years, but few have extracted much Theosophy from it; and yet there are many texts in it which can be rationally interpreted only by means of the Eastern Wisdom.

So one way of approaching the Path is by being much with those who are already treading it. Another way is by reading or hearing about it. I know how it came to me. This teaching came to me in 1882 through Mr. Sinnett's book *The Occult World*; and immediately after that I read his second book *Esoteric Buddhism*. I knew at once that it was true and accepted it, and to hear and to read about it at once fired me with the desire and the absolute intention to know more, to learn all I could on the subject, to pursue it all over the world if necessary until I found it. Shortly-after that I gave up my position in the Church of England and went out to India, because it seemed that more could be done there.

Those, then, are two ways in which people are led to the Path – by reading and hearing of it, and by being in close association with those who are already treading it. The third way which is mentioned in Oriental books is by intellectual development; by sheer force of hard thinking a man may come to grasp some of these principles, though I think that method is rare. Again, they tell us in these Oriental teachings that by the long practice of virtue men may come to the beginning of the Path – that a man may so develop the soul by steadily practising the right so far as he knows it that eventually more and more of the light will open before him. Those are the four ways which they mention in Hindu books. So it is possible that we may have come along any one of those lines. But in any case our coming into this Society is certainly the result of action in previous lives; so in that sense we have deserved it. We have perhaps devoted ourselves to this desire, and in fulfilling it in this life we are also fulfilling our own soul-development, for it is a very important part of that development that we should learn the direction in which our forces are to turn.

The man of great intellect has developed enormously beyond any of us along his own line. Do not imagine that you do not need to advance along his line; do not suppose that you can reach Adeptship without intellectual development. Before you can become a Perfect Man you must have the intellect of the greatest scientist or philosopher, and more; and you must have all the spirituality of the most devoted persons in the world, and more. You must be utterly unselfish; you must have grown in every direction before you can reach full Adeptship. It is just a question of along which of these lines you

unfold first. You must avoid the mistake of thinking that because you have this particular faculty of knowing the direction in which we should turn our force, you are therefore greater or more advanced than the person who has high intellect or spirituality. All of these you have to unfold also, and while you have worked at your faculty, other people have been working at these other faculties.

We have to learn our different lessons, just as a child at school has to learn mathematics and languages and history. He may devote a great deal of his time to one of these subjects and know it quite well, but there may be other children who, although they do not know that one particular subject so well, may be far ahead of him along other lines. You would not speak of those other children as less evolved, but as evolved along another line. So never make the mistake of despising those who have not our Theosophical knowledge. We should know ourselves unworthy to be Theosophists if we had such a feeling as that.

Nevertheless, we undoubtedly have a very great opportunity, and I think myself that we are fortunate to have undertaken this side of the necessary growth first. The man who develops a specially wonderful intellect is liable to certain temptations. It is possible that he may be proud of it, and may therefore look down on the rest of the world. The person of high spirituality should certainly not be proud of his spirituality; yet the very devotional man is liable to look down on what he calls the coldly intellectual man, not understanding that both these powers are necessary, and that he will have in the future to spend many lives in fostering the very intellect which he despises. I think that we are fortunate to that extent above other people, that we have this knowledge of Theosophy which will show us how not to misuse the intellect when we attain it, not to overstrain the devotion, nor to let it, as it so often does, carry its devotees to foolish and extravagant lengths. We who are Theosophists ought to have learnt balance, yet how few of us have perfect balance yet. It is still for most of us a counsel of perfection, something for which we must strive; it ought to be our special quality.

Since we have this magnificent opportunity of the Theosophical teaching, let us show ourselves worthy of it. It is possible for a man to deserve it and to obtain it, and even then to prove unworthy of it after all. Sometimes people will go far along the line of the teaching and then suddenly meet with some circumstances under which they seem unable to apply it. This may occur even with people who are quite old and advanced Theosophists; some little personal matter will crop up, and in the face of that, they will entirely forget their Theosophical teaching, and act precisely as the ignorant outsider might act. Then we have a very sad failure, a serious retrogression. You all know that in our Theosophical history we have seen deplorable examples of that.

No matter, the knowledge is there and it will in due course reassert itself, and progress will be resumed. But such a lamentable failure does involve a severe temporary check. Let us take warning by it; let us be very careful, lest we also should be led astray. If we do not rid ourselves of the personality we are always in danger. We may think we have subdued it, and yet there may come some particular point at which our Theosophical teaching is for the moment forgotten, and that means a heavy fall and a great waste of time for us. Having by hard work in past lives attained this opportunity, let us be careful to use it to the utmost and in the very best and highest manner.

One thing we must assuredly do is to preserve balance and common sense all the way through; so when you receive grandiloquent spiritualistic communications, use your common sense and your Theosophical knowledge, and do not be carried away by the fact that the statement happens to be a personal statement, that it is addressed to you or that it flatters you. Do not let that come into the case; take it from the impersonal point of view: 'Is this really a probable story that is told to me?' If after careful impersonal consideration, it looks as though there might be something in it, at any rate consult

with older students first before acting. Do not be carried away by this presumed spiritual inspiration; it is a dangerous thing, and along that very line many promising people have been shipwrecked.

We have had sad cases where such communications have led to total loss of sanity. Everyone thinks that he or she is quite safe from being led so far. Yes, but remember that the people who have made those very mistakes would have thought themselves quite safe a little while before. We must be careful; one's tendency should always be to mistrust communications of that sort – to exercise considerable caution in regard to them, and to receive them with reservation and circumspection. Read the literature of the subject, and you will very soon see what proportion of the communication is worthy of your attention. Of course, I myself or our great President would always be glad that people should write to us about matters of this sort, and although I am afraid it is often our duty somewhat to discourage high hopes along such lines, yet at any rate we can give you the benefit of such experience as we have had. But in the ultimate every man must stand by himself, and it must be your common sense which is your final guide in all occult matters, as it should be in all matters of the physical plane.

I have mentioned various ways in which messages are received from the unseen world, but there is still another type of communication which is perhaps of more immediate interest to some of our students, and that is the message or instruction occasionally given by a Master of the Wisdom to His pupils. Such messages have been sent at intervals all through the history of our Society. They have, however, been of many different kinds, and have come in diverse ways. Some have been public – addressed, that is to say, to all enquirers; others have been intended for certain groups of students only; yet others have been strictly private, containing advice or instruction to a single pupil. A vast amount of what, now that it is systematized, we usually call Theosophical teaching, came to us in the shape of phenomenally-produced letters, written (or rather precipitated) by order of one or other of the Brotherhood to which our Masters belong.

Students should, however, bear in mind that those early letters were never intended as a complete statement of the ancient doctrine; they were the answers to a number of heterogeneous questions propounded by Messrs. Sinnett and Hume. By slow degrees the outlines of that doctrine began to emerge from this rather chaotic mass of revelation, and Mr. Sinnett tried to reduce it to some sort of order in his *Esoteric Buddhism*.

Each of his chapters is an able statement of the information received on one branch of the subject, but naturally there are many links missing. Madame Blavatsky herself essayed the same gigantic task in her monumental work *The Secret Doctrine*; but, wonderful as was the erudition she displayed, the arrangement was still imperfect, and she so overweighted her volumes with quotations from scientific (perhaps sometimes only quasi-scientific) writers, and with more or less corroborative testimony from all kinds of out-of-the-way sources, that it was still almost impossible for the average man to grasp the scheme as a coherent whole. We owe an immense debt of gratitude to Messrs. B. Keightley, A. Keightley, G. R. S. Mead and, above all, to our President, for their long and arduous labour of systematization and re-arrangement; indeed, it was not until the last-mentioned author published *The Ancient Wisdom* that we had before us a clearly comprehensible statement of Theosophy as we now understand it.

It was not the intention of our Masters that those original letters should be published; indeed, in one of them the Chohan Kuthumi quite clearly stated: 'My letters must not be published'; and later in the same epistle: 'The letters were not written for publication or public comment upon them, but for private use, and neither M. nor I would ever give our consent to see them thus handled.' Mr. Sinnett

promised that at his death he would leave these letters to our President for preservation in the Society's archives; but most unfortunately he either changed his mind or forgot to do this, and so they fell into the hands of one who thought himself wiser in this matter than the Masters, and therefore did just what They had forbidden, though They had given clear warning that to do so 'would only be making confusion worse confounded ... would place you in a still more difficult position, bring criticism upon the heads of the Masters, and thus have a retarding influence on human progress and the Theosophical Society'. This is very readily comprehensible to an ordinary intellect when we see how much of purely personal matter and of advice on questions of merely temporary interest those early letters contain; still more so when we remember that Madame Blavatsky said of them:

It is hardly one out of a hundred occult letters that is ever written by the hand of the Master in whose name and on whose behalf they are sent, as the Masters have neither need nor leisure to write them; and when a Master says 'I wrote that letter', it means only that every word in it was dictated by Him and impressed under His direct supervision. Generally They make Their Chela, whether near or far away, write (or precipitate) them, by impressing upon his mind the ideas They wish expressed, and, if necessary, aiding him in the picture-printing process of precipitation. It depends entirely upon the Chela's state of development how accurately the ideas may be transmitted and the writing-model imitated. (*Lucifer*, vol. iii, p. 93.)

Furthermore, in order to enable him to estimate aright the value in detail of these letters, I most strongly recommend the student to re-read carefully another of Madame Blavatsky's definite statements on this subject, printed on page 617 et seq. of the [HPB's] Centenary number of *The Theosophist*, in which she clearly explains that the 'direct supervision' mentioned above was not always exercised, but that a chela was ordered to satisfy correspondents to the best of his or her ability. I am not for a moment maintaining that the information given in some of those letters was not of the very greatest value and importance to us; on the contrary, it was the beginning of the whole Theosophical revelation; but I do say, having seen the originals, that there are some unquestionably obvious mistakes in detail, and some statements that no Master, with His almost omniscient knowledge, could possibly have made; and I have no doubt that the reasons for such errors are precisely those which Madame Blavatsky gives us.

That, then, was the earliest form in which messages from our Masters came to us in this Theosophical work; but sometimes they were given even more directly. When I first came out to Adyar in 1884, our Masters not infrequently materialized Themselves for a few minutes, so that all who were present could see Them; They spoke with an ordinary audible voice, and various questions were answered in that way. Naturally They could never stay long with us; for we must always remember that the Adepts are the busiest people in the world, and that They have other and infinitely more important work to do than communicating with us. They still look in upon us when They wish to do so, but now They no longer need to waste force in materializing, for there are many among us who can feel Their presence and receive an impression from Them, though there are still but few who can actually see and hear. That method of 'personal apparition' was necessary at that time, because there was no one but Madame Blavatsky who could use the higher vehicles, and she could not be both here and in Europe at the same time. I have mentioned several instances of these appearances in my booklet *How Theosophy Came to Me*.

In these modern days messages are still sometimes sent, though more often to groups or to students in general than to individuals. It is well known that there are certain great occasions in each year on which the Members of the Great White Brotherhood come together to join in the celebration of some important anniversary, to consult as to methods of progress, and to shed a collective blessing upon the world. Such gatherings are always open to any of Their pupils who can attend in their astral bodies,

and it not infrequently happens that after the special ceremony of the day is over, They are gracious enough to move for a few minutes among those pupils, to utter perhaps to one here and another there a few friendly words of advice or encouragement, and sometimes to deliver a short address to be repeated to others of Their pupils or Their school who have not the good fortune to be present. That happened, for example, only a few weeks before the date when I am writing this, at the Festival of the Full Moon of Asadh or Asala in this year 1931, to the very great upliftment and enheartening of those who were privileged to hear.

Students sometimes ask how such messages are actually communicated, and how they can be reproduced upon the physical plane, seeing that they are of necessity delivered on an altogether higher level. I think it should be clearly understood that they can never be fully reproduced – that even the most exquisite diction, the most marvellous eloquence of this lower world can never convey a hundredth part of the wealth of meaning, of the glowing poetry, of the indescribable light and splendour which such an address contains. Even to explain the method of its reception is barely possible except to one who has experienced it.

Here in this physical world one man speaks and another hears; but we all know how words fail us when we try to body forth the highest thought, the noblest emotion; even here we recognize the utter inadequacy of our means of expression. In the astral world feelings and emotions flash telepathically from one to the other; but even there if we wish to convey a conception to another man, we must embody it in words, though those words need not be audibly spoken. Hence the necessity for a common language on that plane. Rising to the mental world, we find that thought can be sent direct from one mental body to another without formulation in words at all, but even so it must be clear-cut and definite, and the recipient will understand it only in proportion to his own development. Each thought takes a form, as is illustrated in our Theosophical book on the subject, but, as will be seen in those pictures, some thoughts are far more vague and cloudy than others. If we rise one stage further we come to the higher mental, the level of the ego in his causal body; there thought takes no concrete form (which is why that world is called Arupa or formless) but passes like a lightning-flash from one ego to another.

The Adept can use His consciousness at any of these levels, and at others far higher still; but naturally He adapts Himself to His audience. Most of those to whom He would be likely to entrust a message will have succeeded in unfolding their consciousness at that causal level; and so it is usually in this splendid flashing glory that His message is expressed. One cannot of course describe what happens; each idea is like a little glowing ball of colour, containing not only the root-idea, but all sorts of correlations and inferences as well. I tried to explain it thus in *The Masters and the Path*:

The thought of an Adept showers upon His pupil a kind of hailstorm of lovely little spheres, each of which is an idea with its relation to other ideas quite clearly worked out; but if the pupil is fortunate enough to remember and clever enough to translate such a hailstorm, he is likely to find that he may need twenty pages of foolscap to express that one moment's deluge, and even then, of course, the expression is necessarily imperfect. (Op. cit., p. 170.)

Just because only ideas are given, and not words, each who hears must obviously translate it in his own way. I do not mean merely that a Frenchman would write it down in French, and an Englishman in English; I also mean that each man will write it in his own style. He cannot do otherwise if he has to be natural, and he must at all costs avoid being affected or stilted. If on rare occasions a Master does condescend for some special purpose to use actual physical words, what He says is always terse and to the point, each sentence full of meaning. Some of us try to catch and reproduce that, but I think

even then our translation tends to be longer than the original! Some translators are naturally more diffuse and verbose, and seek to enforce their point by much repetition; it is only an effort in another direction to bring out the tremendous force of the Master's speech, but no method can ever be fully successful. Be sure that the Adept wastes no words.

This influence of the idiosyncrasies of the reporter was often very evident in the messages which came through Madame Blavatsky. She had her own special use of certain English words, her own forms of expression and construction, and these are to be seen now and then in her transcripts of letters and messages. The prejudiced scoffer seizes upon this and declares the letter an obvious forgery, but he shows thereby only his own crass ignorance of the subject, and his incapability to realize the meticulous care taken by those upon whom falls the responsibility of bringing through these priceless communications.

The personal equation of the bearer of a message is undoubtedly a fact to be taken into consideration. On the other hand, it is only fair to say that those who have been trained by our Masters and Their older pupils have always been most earnestly warned to beware of it, and many of them have spent arduous years in eliminating it. I remember very vividly the care and trouble which my own Teacher devoted to this matter in 1885, when He was instructing me as to the transference to the physical brain of something seen or heard by the inner senses. I have mentioned elsewhere how He would make a strong thought-form, and say to me: 'What do you see?' And when I described it to the best of my ability, would come again and again the comment: 'No, no ; you are not seeing true ; you are not seeing all; dig deeper into yourself, use your mental vision as well as your astral; press just a little further, a little higher.'

Precisely the same method was adopted with regard to the translation of messages. He would throw out one of those flashing, jewel-like little balls of living light, and direct me to express it in such words as I could; then He would say: 'Right as far as it goes; but cannot you make more of it than that – much more ? Look more closely, look into the very heart of it; don't miss a single shade of colour or form; don't let your preconceptions blind you or cramp your interpretation.' And often I had to repeat my effort many times before my mentor was satisfied. More information on this whole subject of messages may be found in *The Masters and the Path*, 2nd edition, page 157 et seq; it is unnecessary for me to repeat it here.

But finally and most emphatically I should like to impress upon our students that they should judge every message upon its own merits, even if it claims to represent the wish of an Adept or of the whole Hierarchy, and apply to it their own reason and common sense. I would say to them: Beware most especially of the entity who flatters you, in whatever form he may show himself – of the message which tells you that you are marked out for a sublime destiny, that you alone in all the world are sufficiently developed to be able to express to that world the truth which he wishes to convey to it, that you are the predestined saviour of mankind. We have all of us a sublime destiny, we are all moving upward and onward to a glory beyond human understanding, but we are still some distance from that goal. We may all, here and now, be helpers of mankind; perchance in the far future one or two among us may become worthy of the title of its saviours; but not yet. In *Light on the Path* it is written:

Remember, O disciple, that, great though the gulf may be between the good man and the sinner, it is greater between the good man and the man who has attained knowledge; it is immeasurable between the good man and the one on the threshold of divinity. Therefore, be wary lest too soon you fancy yourself a thing apart from the mass.

We who have been privileged to see the light of Theosophy, we who humbly and patiently study its teachings, do stand 'apart from the mass' in that, because we know so much more, we have a far greater responsibility; but pride is a very subtle vice, and we shall do well to receive with caution messages which flatter us beyond all reason.

Of course if a man knows, or has very strong reason to believe, that a certain communication comes from a Master of the Wisdom, he will inevitably and quite rationally attach much greater importance to it than he would to the saying of an ordinary 'spirit-guide'. He would read it with the closest attention; if there were any passages in it which he could not fully understand, he would study them heedfully, and seek to fathom their hidden meaning. But even so, he should examine very carefully and without prejudice his reasons for that belief, bearing always in mind that magnificently liberal utterance of the Lord Buddha in the *Kālāma Sutta*:

O ye Kālāmas, it is right to doubt, it is right to be perplexed; for perplexity arises concerning a matter of doubt. But, Kālāmas, when you know for yourselves thus : These doctrines are wrong, faulty and censured by the wise, when accepted and followed they lead to evil and misery, then, Klāmas, cast them aside, even though you have heard them, or they are the tradition, or they are generally accepted, or they are found in the sacred books, or they seem to follow logically, or you consider them in accordance with science, or they seem convincing on their appearance, or are agreeable to your personal views, or you are impressed by the speaker, and even though the person who utters them is your teacher. (1)

(1) This, I am told, is a correct translation of the Pali original; that given to Colonel Olcott by a learned Buddhist monk, and published in his *Buddhist Catechism*, differs slightly. In that rendering the address concludes with a sort of summary: 'For this have I taught you, not to believe merely because you have heard, but when you believe of your own consciousness, then to act accordingly and abundantly.'