

The Maha-Chohan Letter

Compiled by Pedro Oliveira

Virginia Hanson, in her note to letter No. 21 in the chronological edition of *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* (1993, Vicente Hao Chin, Jr., Editor, The Theosophical Publishing House, Manila), states that “The Simla Eclectic Theosophical Society” had been formed on August 21 [1881]. A. O. Hume was its President and A.P. Sinnett was the Vice-President. Below is the statement by Mahatma K.H. to A. P. Sinnett regarding the difficulties faced by the S.E.T.S. and the perception of the Chohan [Maha-Chohan] regarding its viability:

You may tell Massey what I now say of him, and the reasons given. You may — though I would not advise you — read this letter to Mr. Hume. But I would strongly urge upon you the necessity of a greater caution than ever. Notwithstanding the purity of motives, the Chohan might one day consider but the results, and these may threaten to become too disastrous for him to overlook. There should be a constant pressure brought to bear upon the members of the S.E.S. [Simla Eclectic Society] to keep their tongues and enthusiasm at bay. And yet there is an increasing concern in the public mind, in regard to your Society and you may soon be called upon to define your position more clearly. Very soon I will have to leave you to yourselves for the period of three months. Whether it will begin in October or January will depend on the impulse given to the Society and its progress. (Letter #21)

The Simla Eclectic Theosophical Society was formed under special permission of the Mahatmas’s Master – the Maha-Chohan. However, the attitude of Hume and to some extent of Sinnett did not help with the success of this venture. Although Mr Sinnett corresponded with the Mahatmas for a period of over five years, Mr Hume resigned his membership of the TS in 1884. One of the reasons for the debacle of the Simla Eclectic Theosophical Society was the insistence from both Englishmen in putting emphasis on the need for psych powers and phenomena above the principle of Universal Brotherhood without distinctions. Briefly stated, this is the background to the famous letter which is presented in this paper.

In an article in *Lucifer*, Vol. II, No. 12, August, 1888, pp. 421-433, H. P. Blavatsky quotes from this letter as being written in 1880. However, in the body of the letter there is a reference to “1881 years ago”. Boris De Zirkoff, the Compiler of *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings* (fifteen volumes) stated that the precise date on which the letter was written is uncertain. What is certain is that it was written as a warning to the members of the Simla Eclectic Theosophical Society regarding their attitude to the guiding principles of the TS.

Since it became known the Maha-Chohan’s Letter has been a source of inspiration to many members of the Theosophical Society. It is suffused with the spirit of compassion and altruism that guided the Founders of the Society in all their work for it for many years. It commits the TS to Altruism, Truth, Universal Brotherhood, but also to an earnest dissemination of the teachings of Theosophy as a gateway to a life of freedom from superstition, fear and self-centredness. It is an incomparable document issued by one of the truly Great Ones of this earth.

Below are two texts of the letter: the first one published in *Lucifer*, Vol. XVIII, August 15, 1896, No. 108, a magazine edited at that time by Annie Besant and G.R.S. Mead, and the other one from a private collection which was displayed at an exhibition of a number of the

Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom at the Archives of the Theosophical Society during the 2018 International Convention of the TS held at Adyar, Chennai, India, in December.

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 preach and popularise 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 Maha-Chohan

AN IMPORTANT LETTER.

THE following letter was circulated by H. P. B. among many of her pupils, and some quotations from it have been published from time to time. But, so far as I know, it has not seen the light in its entirety, and it will be read with general interest. It reached H. P. B.'s hands in 1886, from a source she much revered.

The doctrine we promulgate being the only true one, must—supported by such evidence as we are preparing to give—become ultimately triumphant, like every other truth. Yet it is absolutely necessary to inculcate it gradually; enforcing its theories (unimpeachable facts for those who know) with direct inference, deduced from and corroborated by, the evidence furnished by modern exact science. That is why Col. H. S. Olcott, who works to revive Buddhism, may be regarded as one who labours in the true path of

Theosophy, far more than any man who chooses as his goal the gratification of his own ardent aspirations for occult knowledge. Buddhism, stripped of its superstition, is eternal truth; and he who strives for the latter is striving for Theo-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 preach and popularize a knowledge of Theosophy. It is not the individual and determined purpose of attaining Nirvâna—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 to benefit by it as many of our fellow creatures as we possibly can, which constitutes the true Theosophist.

The intellectual portion of mankind seems to be fast dividing 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 intellect and 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, and 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 be followed—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 whereon to rest her weary unwelcome feet.

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 the truth, no prophet has ever achieved during his life-time a complete triumph—not even Buddha. The Theosophical Society was chosen as the cornerstone, 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, 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 for 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 Lévi would have called it) how is the combative natural instinct of man to be restrained from inflicting hitherto unheard-of cruelty and enormous tyranny, injustice, etc., if not through the soothing influence of brotherhood, and of the practical application of Buddha's esoteric doctrines? For everyone knows that total emancipation from the 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, delivered from their dead-weight of dogmatism, interpretations, personal names, anthropomorphic conceptions, and salaried priests, the fundamental doctrines of all religions will be proved identical in their esoteric meaning. Osiris, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, will be shown as different means for one and the same royal highway of final bliss—Nirvâna. Mystical Christianity teaches *Self-redemption* through one's own seventh principle, the liberated Paramâtmâ, called by the one Christ, by others Buddha; this is equivalent to regeneration, or rebirth in spirit, and it therefore expounds just the same truth as the Nirvâna 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, and recognize the reality of the transcendental Self, the Buddha, the Christ, or God of every preacher. This is why even esoteric Buddhism is the surest path to lead men toward the one esoteric truth.

As we find the world now, whether Christian, Mussulman, or Pagan, justice is disregarded, and honour and mercy are both flung to the winds. In a word, how—since the main objects of the Theosophical Society are misinterpreted by those who are most willing to serve us personally—are we to deal with the rest of mankind? with that 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 almost the universal scheme of the universe? We answer, because no religion, with the exception of Buddhism, has taught a practical contempt for this earthly life; while each of them, always with that 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 of any religion, it was remarked that those mothers who devoured their children belonged to localities where there was none; and that where 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 our own Karma [the cause producing the effects] 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 Tibetans. The world in general, and Christendom especially, left for 2,000 years to the *régime* of a personal God, as well as to 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 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 those professions a mockery? And if a mockery, can ours be the true path? Shall we 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, of cup-growing, of the spiritual telephone, and astral body formation, and leave the teeming millions of the ignorant, of the poor and oppressed, to take care of themselves, and of their hereafter, as best they can? Never! perish rather the Theosophical Society with both its hapless Founders, than that we should permit it to become no better than an academy of magic, and 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 Theosophical Society 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 Tibet and its mystical hierarchy of perfect Lamas there was one which was correctly understood and described. The incarnations of the Bodhisattva Padmapâni or Avalokiteshvara, of Tsongkapa, and that of Amitâbha, relinquished 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. In other words, that they might be again and again subjected to misery, imprisonment in flesh, and all the sorrows of life provided that they, by such a self-sacrifice, repeated throughout long and weary centuries, might become the means of securing salvation and bliss in the hereafter for a handful of men chosen among but one of the many planetary races of mankind. And it is we, the humble disciples of these perfect Lamas who are expected to allow the Theosophical Society to drop its noblest title, that of the Brotherhood of Humanity, to become a simple school of philosophy! No, no, good brothers, you have been labouring under the mistake too long already. Let us understand each other. He who does not feel competent 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 erroneous impressions of outsiders, by himself actually propagating this idea. Oh! for noble and unselfish men to help us effectually in that divine task! All our knowledge, past and present, would not be sufficient to repay them.

Having explained our views and aspirations, I have but a few words more to add. The true religion and philosophy 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, has 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 1886 years ago. They are as far from the solution as they were; but to these problems there must be somewhere a consistent solution, and if our doctrines will show their competence to offer it, then the world will be the first to confess that *there* must be the true philosophy, the true religion, the true light, which gives truth and nothing but the truth.

Strictly Private & Confidential

Several good reasons, given to Mahatma H. H., why the T. S. should be a Brotherhood of Humanity.

1. 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 & corroborated by the evidence furnished by modern exact science. That is why Col: 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, & he who strives for the latter is striving for theo-sophia, — Divine Wisdom, which is a synonym of truth. For our doctrines to practically re-act on the so-called moral code or the ideas of truthfulness, purity, self-denial, charity, etc, we have to preach & popularise a knowledge of Theosophy. It is not the individual & determined purpose of attaining oneself Nirvana (the culmination of all knowledge & absolute wisdom) which is after all, only an exalted & 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 dividing 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 groves of bigotry & 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 & simple, in cases of failure to millenniums of degradation after physical dissolution. Those "intellectual classes" reacting upon the ignorant masses, which they attract & which look up to them as noble & fit examples to follow, degrade & morally ruin those they ought to protect & guide. Between degrading superstition, & still more degrading brutal materialism, the white dove of truth has hardly room where to rest her weary, unwelcome foot. It's 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 life time, 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 objects a greater, wiser, & especially more benevolent intermingling, of the high & the low, of the alpha & 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; - He is no Theosophist who objects to this principle. ———.

In view of the ever increasing triumph & at the same time, misuse of free-thought & liberty (the universal reign of Satan, Elias Lévi would have called it) how is the combative natural instinct of man to be restrained from inflicting hitherto unheard of cruelties & enormities, tyranny, injustice &c, if not through the soothing influence of a brotherhood & of the practical application

of Buddha's esoteric doctrines. For as everyone knows total emancipation from the one all-pervading power or law called God by the priests, Buddha, Divine Wisdom & enlightenment or Theosophy, by the philosophers of all ages, means also the emancipation from that of human law? Once unfettered, delivered from their dead-weight of dogmatic interpretations, personal names, anthropomorphic conceptions & salaried priests, the fundamental doctrine of all religions will be proved identical in their esoteric meaning.

Osiris, Christna, Buddha, Christ will be shown as different means for one & the same royal highway to final bliss: Nirvana.

Mystical Christianity, that is to say that christianity which teaches self-redemption through one's own seventh principle, this liberated Para-âtma (Anagoeides) called by the one Christ, by others Buddha, & equivalent to regeneration or re-birth 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 esoteric Buddhism is the surest path to lead men toward the one esoteric truth. As we find the world now, whether Christian, Muslim or Pagan, justice is disregarded & honour & mercy both flung to the winds. In a word, how, since 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 that curse known as the "struggle for life" which is the real & most prolific parent of most woes & sorrows & 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 & 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 & America. It weakens in the pagan lands, & is nearly unknown among Buddhist populations. (In China during famine & where the masses ~~were~~ 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 most of Christian missionaries to be found; where there were none & 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 & an illusion, that it is but our own Karma, the cause producing the effect, that is our own judge, our Saviour in future lives, — & the great struggle for life will soon lose its intensity.

There are no penitentiaries in Buddhist lands & crime is nearly unknown among the Buddhist Tibetans.

The world, in general & Christendom especially, left for two thousand years to the regime of a personal god, as well as its political & social systems based on that idea, has now proved a failure. If Theosophists say: we have nothing to do with all this, the lower classes & the inferior races (those of India for instance in the conception of the British) cannot concern us & must manage as they can; — what becomes of our fine professions of benevolence, philanthropy, reform etc? Are these professions a mockery? & if a mockery can our's be the true path? Should we 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, & leave

the teeming millions of the ignorant, of the poor & despised, the lowly & the oppressed to take care of themselves & of their hereafter the best they ~~can~~ know how. — Never. Perish rather the Theosophical Society 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 Theosophical Society 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 Tibet & its mystical hierarchy of "perfect lamas", there is one which was correctly understood & described. "The incarnations of the Bodhisattva, Padma Pawi or Avalokiteswara, & of Tsong-ka-pa that of Amitabha, relinquish at their death the attainment of Buddhahood, i.e. the summum bonum of bliss & of individual personal felicity, that they might be born again & again for the benefit of mankind". In other words that they might be again & again subjected to misery, imprisonment in flesh & all the sorrows of life, provided that by such a self-sacrifice repeated throughout long & dreary centuries, they might become the means of securing salvation & 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 noblest title, that of the Brotherhood of Humanity to become a simple school of psychology? No, no, good brothers, 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} removing the erroneous impressions of outsiders, if not by actually propagating himself the idea. Oh for the noble & unselfish man to help us effectually in India in that divine task. All our knowledge past & present would not be sufficient to repay him. Having explained our views & aspirations, I have but a few words more to add.

To be true, religion ~~must~~ & 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 & philosophies, those of the civilised races less than any other, have ever possessed the truth. The right & logical explanations on the subject of the problems of the great dual principles, right & wrong, good & evil, liberty & despotism, pain & pleasure, egotism & 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, & if our doctrines will show their competence to offer it, then the world will be the first one to confess, that must be the true philosophy, the true religion, the true light, which gives truth & nothing but the truth.

An abridged ^{version of the} view of the Chohan as on the T.S. from his own words. signed. H. H.

