

AN INTRODUCTION TO

The Mahatma Letters

A STUDY GUIDE
BY
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THIRD EDITION

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Foreword to the Third Edition

The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett, first published in 1923, remains a primary source of Theosophical teachings. Such a book is not intended for the casual reader of Theosophical literature but rather for the serious student or scholar. For over two decades Virginia Hanson's study guide has proven to be a useful tool for those desiring to become familiar with the *Letters*. It is hoped that this latest edition will continue to guide the next generation of students as they explore that seminal work.

The third edition of *An Introduction to the Mahatma Letters* includes letter and page references from the chronological edition of the *Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*; references to the second and third editions of the *Mahatma Letters*, which are still in circulation, have been retained. In addition, some material has been rewritten to bring it up to date; titles of contemporary books have been added and may be found in the

reference lists that conclude each chapter. I am greatly indebted to Joy Mills for her kind and expert assistance in this regard.

A few typographical errors that were discovered in the earlier editions of the study guide have also been corrected. The index that formed Appendix D of the previous editions has been deleted entirely. Its practical value had diminished as the chronological edition of the *Mahatma Letters* contains a greatly expanded index. Further, the copious footnotes found in the earlier editions relating to letters and page numbers in the *Mahatma Letters* have been converted to parenthetical text references for ease of reading; footnotes consisting of substantive comments by the author have been placed in the Notes section. Finally, stylistic changes to the graphics of the text have hopefully made this study guide more esthetically pleasing and easier to use.

David P. Bruce
Director of Education

Foreword to the First Edition

So many of us have developed such a deep respect for the *Mahatma Letters* over the years that we want to share this respect with others. How best to do so is not an easy matter. We hope this study guide will serve the purpose. We hope it will inspire the student to read the letters in chronological order. They are not easy, as is the case with most things that have depth. Even the controversial issues in the letters seem to force students to think for themselves, to consider issues in a light they may never have considered on their own, to challenge some of the current thinking in their culture, and to ponder about the depth at which the Masters hint, which somehow goes beyond the mere words they use.

You cannot read the *Mahatma Letters* without experiencing wonder and awe. You cannot read them without some conflict being aroused. Some of our most cherished ideas are challenged. The Masters do not lull or placate us; they do not reassure us that “all is right with the world.” They do not say, “Everything happens for the best.” They make the best they can of situations that are “bad,” but they don’t say that it had to happen that way. Nor do they reassure

us that everything will be taken care of for us. They put the responsibility back on us instead of encouraging us to look toward them or a God to take care of us. For many people, this is hard to accept. We grow up in a culture where we are led to believe that if we just give our devotion to the right source, or if we just “believe” the right thing, we will be taken care of. The fact that such ideas are challenged by the Masters increases their credibility. They do not attempt to lull us to sleep with easy sounding platitudes and pious pronouncements. On the contrary, the Masters encourage us to think independently. Wisdom does not come with lack of effort on the part of the student.

This study guide can be used in different ways. Each chapter has further references at the end. An individual studying alone may want to read some or all of them. For group study it is recommended that the references be assigned to individuals to share with the group so that the material may be covered by at least one person. This should lead to a more lively discussion during meetings and a sharing of the workload.

A word of caution is necessary for newcomers who want to look up references to

readings in the letters themselves. This can be a double-edged sword. Sometimes there may be material on the page that has no relevance whatsoever to the topic of the chapter in the study guide. In fact, it might even raise controversial topics and conflicts that the newcomer should not tackle until better acquainted with the *Mahatma Letters* as a whole. Insofar as possible, such references have been avoided.

On the other hand, one of the strengths of looking up more than one reference in the *Mahatma Letters* is that it acquaints the student with an important methodology. It has been said that certain Theosophical books are not best read sequentially from cover to cover. This is particularly true of *The Secret Doctrine* and *The Mahatma Letters*. One very useful method is to look up a topic in the index and examine all the references. This can produce a larger framework than just reading one letter and is recommended for serious students. However, the indices to the second and third editions of the *Mahatma Letters* are not as complete as

could be desired, though the third edition was updated. A chronological edition is now available, which includes a greatly expanded index. Reading the *Mahatma Letters* in chronological order (using Appendix A of this guide or the *Readers Guide to the Mahatma Letters* by George Linton and Virginia Hanson) is by far the preferred method, as it will give an overall perspective. After that, the index method of looking up topics becomes even more meaningful.

Another recommendation is that students purchase a copy of Katherine Beechey's *Daily Meditations*. It contains a brief quotation from the *Mahatma Letters* for a meditation for each day of the year. It is surprising how many of these quotes stick in the mind after such a procedure and thus serve many useful purposes, including giving the student a feeling that he or she learns more than they would by just reading the material.

Welcome to a new world and a book rich with potential. We hope it stimulates your appetite for pursuing wisdom as the Masters tried to share it.

The Editor

Introduction

In using this study guide, the student must have available a copy of the book, *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, transcribed and compiled by A. T. Barker. Four editions of this work have been published. Few copies of the original edition, published in 1923, are now extant. The second edition was published in 1926 by Rider & Company of London. The third edition was published in 1962 by the Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, India. Some corrections and editorial notes were added in this edition, greatly increasing its value. The fourth edition is the chronological edition, arranged and edited by Vicente Hao Chin, Jr., and first published by the Theosophical Publishing House, Manila, in 1993. A second printing was published in 1998 by the Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai, India. This chronological edition is based on the third edition of the book, incorporating the corrections and editorial notes of that edition. In addition, the chronological edition includes a number of extremely helpful prefatory notes compiled by Virginia Hanson, thus increasing its significance and value for the student. It is the chronological edition that is rap-

idly becoming the standard work; it may be purchased from the Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Illinois, and should be available in most branch (lodge) libraries. As many branch (lodge) libraries may have copies of the second and/or third editions, references are given to those in this guide, and the second edition is available for purchase from Theosophical University Press, Pasadena, California.

It should be pointed out that there are differences in the pagination of the several editions. When quotations from the letters are given in this guide, the page from the second edition will be given first, followed by a diagonal line, and the page from the third edition will follow; then the page from the chronological edition will be indicated by a "C" with number following. For example, 190/187; C-266. In this way, the student will have no difficulty in locating the passage in any of the editions.

One glance at the volume makes it apparent that no study guide could deal with every one of the 145 letters contained in it without writing a tome the size of an unabridged dictionary. Further, some of the letters are of minor importance to such a

study. Fortunately, it is not necessary to have a commentary on every letter to gain some understanding of this unique volume of Theosophical literature, even though the student will find it useful to read every letter as the study progresses.

Some background information concerning the circumstances and events surrounding the writing of these remarkable documents is, however, essential to any comprehension of their purpose and nature. Much of this background information has been incorporated in prefatory notes in the chronological edition. It is true that the philosophy embodied in them, particularly in its more technical aspects, is more systematically presented in later Theosophical works, although it is implicit in the letters themselves. Frequently some profound truth gleams out suddenly from a surrounding mass of references to then-existing situations, comments on various individuals, and other matters seeming to have little relevance to the philosophy itself.

It may be asked, "Why study the letters if the teachings are given in more comprehensible form elsewhere?" The answer will depend to some extent upon the individual's willingness to engage in a unique adventure. To study the concepts as they are presented by a highly intelligent and skilled writer is certainly desirable and could well accompany the study of this volume; to engage one's whole being with them as they come directly from those great personages whom we call *Mahatmas*, *Adepts*, *Rishis*—and especially to be able to set them in the context of circumstances, personalities, and events involved—has a special and imme-

diate impact. What they lack in "good organization" as we in the West might term it, they more than make up for in the rich vitality not always present in intellectual reconstructions of the philosophy presented.

Approaching the study of the letters without some guidance, however, can prove to be a formidable, even discouraging, undertaking. The book is challenging but not easy. Nevertheless, to persevere is to be rewarded; and it is in the interest of this result that this study guide has been prepared.

The manner in which the letters are arranged in the early editions may compound the problem for the student. They were grouped under topical headings rather than chronologically. Few of them are dated, and although A. P. Sinnett—to whom most of them were addressed—did in many instances note the date of receipt, he was not always consistent or strictly accurate in this. It is obvious that he frequently guessed at the date some time afterward, and now and then, apparently, he guessed wrong. Only by a careful study of the context of the letters, along with comparisons with other sources having to do with events during that time, is it possible to arrive at a reasonably accurate decision concerning their order. This has been done and is reflected in the chronological edition as well as in the chronological listing included in this guide (see Appendix A).

The originals of the letters are in the custody of the British Museum in London. How this came about is described in the editors' preface to the third edition and in some of the other books which will

be recommended. For many years these documents have been preserved in bound volumes. In addition they have been microfilmed and copies of the films have been placed in several institutions over the world, thus reducing the danger of their being lost to posterity through war or natural disaster.

Several books are suggested as supplementary reading. They will greatly enrich the study of the letters and, in some instances, are essential to that study. All are available from the Henry S. Olcott Memorial Library of the Theosophical Society in America at Wheaton, Illinois or can be purchased from the Theosophical Publishing House at www.questbooks.net.

The Occult World by A. P. Sinnett is almost a “must” in understanding how the correspondence came about and in describing some of the subsequent developments.

Esoteric Buddhism, A. P. Sinnett’s second book, clarifies and systematizes many of the teachings embodied in the letters.

Readers Guide to the Mahatma Letters, compiled and edited by George E. Linton and Virginia Hanson, is a valuable aid, used along with the study of the letters themselves. The appearance of the original of each letter is described, the circumstances surrounding its receipt are outlined, and many obscure references are explained. The *Guide* cannot be read by itself; it must be consulted along with the study of the letters.

Masters and Men: The Human Story in The Mahatma Letters, by Virginia Hanson, is particularly helpful in grasping the intimate, living nature of the letters. Although written in fictional form, the story

is authentic and thoroughly documented. The common experience in reading it is that it makes the letters—as well as the Mahatmas themselves and their correspondents—“come alive.” The student is especially urged to read this book along with the study of the letters. Many persons who have been students of the letters for years have commented that this book clarifies much in the letters that had not previously been understood.

The Mahatmas and Their Letters by Geoffrey A. Barborka is invaluable for its in-depth treatment of several of the letters and for the wealth of detailed information it contains.

The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett is another rich source of information and human interest, as it represents the letters received by Mr. A. P. Sinnett from that remarkable woman during the period covered by the correspondence with the two Mahatmas.

Old Diary Leaves by Henry Steel Olcott, especially the first three volumes, throws much light on the situations and events during the same period.

Other sources having to do with the history of the Theosophical Society would be helpful and interesting, as would the early issues of *The Theosophist*, the magazine published by H. P. Blavatsky and Henry S. Olcott, co-founders of the Theosophical Society. The books listed above, however, are the most essential.

In addition, the following video DVD is recommended:

The Mahatmas and Their Letters produced by Steve Schweizer, presents historical background on the Mahatmas, their letters, and their relationship to the Theosophical Society and provides a brief introduction to

the Theosophical philosophy as presented in the letters. Included are interviews with Joy Mills, Ed Abdill, and Ianthe Hoskins (all noted students of the *Mahatma Letters*), slides of some of the original letters, and photos of the individuals associated with this period. (40 minutes)

This study guide may be used by either individuals or groups. At the close of each chapter are questions designed for both group discussion and individual study. Active participation in such an undertaking can be made extremely fruitful, especially if members are willing to do some individual research and present their findings to the group. It is not absolutely necessary to have a discussion leader, although this is advisable if the discussion is to be kept pertinent to the material presented in the lessons. An interesting experiment, which would give the different members of the

group experience and training, would be to rotate the discussion leaders. However, this is a matter that should be decided by the group itself.

In closing, the study of the *Mahatma Letters* can be a lifetime occupation, for their wealth of wisdom is inexhaustible, applying in the most amazing manner to the experiences and problems met by people in their daily lives in any age, and particularly in their efforts to find and tread the spiritual path.

Some abbreviations used throughout this study guide:

Collected Writings—*The H. P. Blavatsky
Collected Writings*

ML—*The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*

OW—*The Occult World*

CHAPTER 1

What is a Mahatma?

Literally, the word *Mahatma* means “great soul.” It is generally used in Theosophical literature to designate an individual who has evolved through and learned all that the human situation has to teach, who has mastered the laws of nature involved in human existence, and who has therefore “graduated” from that stage to a more advanced place in the evolutionary scheme. This evolutionary development is primarily a matter of consciousness, not of form. They say of themselves, “We are not gods, and even they, our chiefs—they *hope*” (ML 210/208; C-31).¹ However, because of boundless compassion for those who are still struggling with the problems of human evolution, such individuals forego their rewards and postpone their final liberation in order to remain close to humanity and to help it onward.

In speaking of the Mahatmas, H. P. Blavatsky,² who brought knowledge of the Mahatmas to the West, commented: “They are living men, not ‘spirits’. . . Their knowledge and learning are immense, and their personal holiness of life is still greater—still they are mortal men and none of them 1,000 years old as imagined by some” (CW, 8:400).

When asked about the age of her own Master, the Mahatma Morya, she replied: “My dear, I cannot tell you exactly, for I do not know. But this I will tell you. I met him first when I was twenty . . . He was at the very prime of manhood then. I am an old woman now³ but he has not aged a day. He is still in the prime of manhood.”

Her questioner persisted and asked her whether the Mahatmas had discovered the elixir of life, and she replied in all seriousness: “That is no fable. It is only the veil hiding a real occult process, warding off age and dissolution for periods which would seem fabulous, so I will not mention them. The secret is this: for every man there is a climacteric, when he must draw near to death; if he has squandered his life-powers, there is no escape for him; but if he has lived according to the law, he may pass through and so continue in the same body almost indefinitely.”⁴

Many strange ideas have arisen about the Mahatmas. In the letter to a friend (see endnote 3), HPB told of how she and Colonel Olcott had gone to Pondicherry (India) to form a new branch of the Theosophical Society, and only three or four joined

when they had expected the usual 50 or 60. “Why?” she asked. “Simply because I had said to an influential member that our Mahatmas did not sit buried in the earth, letting their toenails and fingernails grow long and the birds make nests in their top-knots—for such was *his* idea. He left the T. S. and led away almost all the others.”

Annie Besant, in an article entitled “Who Are the Masters?” (*The Theosophist*, February 1938) commented: “They are men who have evolved during past ages, through hundreds of lives like our own. They, in the past, lived and loved and wrought and toiled as we are living, loving, working, and toiling now. They are bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh; they belong to our own humanity and differ from us in nothing save that they are older and more advanced than we are. They are not placid gods in a far-off heaven. They are men on our earth who have conquered death, who have won immortality.”

It needs to be understood that although the Mahatmas have physical existence, the real Adept is not the physical body but the higher aspect of *manas* (sometimes termed higher mind) which, through the process of self-evolution, is inseparably united with the *buddhi* and *atma* (see the *Occult Glossary* by G. de Purucker),⁵ that is, with the two highest principles in the human constitution. Another very important reference on the question is the article “Mahatmas and Chelas” by Blavatsky (*Collected Writings*, 6:239).

In these days, as we know, there are many self-styled “masters” exploiting the spiritual hunger of people everywhere. A former

international president of the Theosophical Society, N. Sri Ram, has commented: “The question would not arise if those concerned knew something about what an Adept is, as explained in the *Mahatma Letters*. Writing about themselves, one of them says: ‘None of you have ever formed an accurate idea of the “masters” or of the laws of occultism they are guided by.’” Sri Ram went on to say, “The Adepts do not ever advertise themselves, nor do they seek followers. Their work, for the most part, lies away from the world, whose ways are not their ways. If all Theosophists understand this, there will be none amongst us ready to lend an ear to persons who seek to impress others by claiming occult connections with mysterious beings, or that they themselves are the manifestations of such beings.”⁶

This aspect is extremely important; one should be as clear as possible in one’s own mind and not be led astray by extravagant claims such as those mentioned by N. Sri Ram. In a very fine book entitled *Man, Son of Man* by Sri Madhava Ashish, the author comments on the problem of recognizing a Master:

The key to true recognition lies in the heart, for when we turn our search inward, seeking the root of certainty within ourselves, then, even before we begin to find, we discover an ability to recognize in another the true actualization of what we are seeking . . . Indeed, it is not what the Perfect Man teaches that matters, so much as what he is, or, rather, *that* he is, for his being is a guarantee of what we seek . . . it is in our hearts that he speaks, and eventually in our hearts that he dwells . . . The

ability to recognize a Master of the Secret Wisdom depends not on any particular quality of his own but on what we are in ourselves . . . the teacher compels us to develop our capacity for direct perception of truth.⁷

Our personal ideas about the Masters may be inaccurate, colored by our wishful thinking and imagination; we may tend to deify them; we may tend to trivialize or to personalize them. They themselves assure us in the letters that they are Adepts only when acting as Adepts, i.e. when their consciousness is centered in and acting at the Adept level. Otherwise, they say they are as liable to error as anyone. It would seem logical to assume, however, that even in their “ordinary” consciousness they have greater wisdom, knowledge, and compassion than we can conceive, since they represent the fruition of evolution through the human kingdom.

The authors of the *Mahatma Letters* are two of these great Adepts, members of the Himalayan Brotherhood.⁸

Most of the letters are signed by the Mahatma Koot Hoomi—a mystical name which he instructed HPB (through whom the correspondence was in large part carried on) to use in connection with the letters (ML 210/208; C-31). Usually he signed only his initials, “K.H.,” although the early letters were signed with the full name, Koot Hoomi Lal Singh.⁹

The Mahatma Koot Hoomi was a Kashmiri Brahmin by birth, but at the time of the correspondence he was a member of the Gelugpa, or “Yellow Hat” division of Tibetan Buddhism. He was educated at sev-

eral European universities and was fluent in both English and French. The Mahatma Morya, who took over the correspondence for a time, spoke of him as “my frenchified K.H.” (ML 439/432; C-83).

According to HPB, the Mahatma Morya was a Rajput prince by birth. “One of the old warrior race of the Indian desert,” she said, “the finest and handsomest nation in the world.” He was a giant, six feet eight inches in height, and “splendidly built; a superb type of manly beauty” (*Collected Writings*, 8:399). The Mahatma K.H. referred to him as “my bulky brother” (ML 294/290; C-230). As did the Mahatma K.H., the Mahatma Morya usually signed the letters with only his initial, “M.” He was not proficient in English and spoke of himself as using words and phrases “lying idle in my friend’s brain”—meaning, of course, the brain of the Mahatma K.H. (ML 259/255; C-112).¹⁰

Several facts become apparent as one studies these letters. The two Mahatmas who wrote them both had a very fine sense of humor, but different in each case. As pointed out by C. Jinarajadasa, editor of *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, First and Second Series, the humor of the Mahatma K.H. was “more akin to the French notion of wit, that of the Master M. is far more allied to what the Greek tragedians meant by ‘irony.’” He added, “Those who can appreciate the Master’s ‘irony’ find great inspiration in the glimpses gained of things seen from his angle of vision.”¹¹

A very beautiful relationship existed between these two Mahatmas. The Mahatma K.H. was, in a sense, the Mahatma M.’s

protege. When, at one point in the course of the correspondence the Mahatma K.H. went on a three-month retreat,¹² the Mahatma M. took over the task of carrying on the correspondence. Commenting on the younger Master's request to him to do this, he said, "What is there I would not have promised him in that hour!" He then described the place where the Master was secluded and added, "It is there, where now rests your lifeless friend—my brother, the light of my soul" (ML 219/216–17; C-87).

The Master K.H. was, of course, not actually lifeless, but his consciousness was functioning out of his body. It may be added here, however, that they were members of a hierarchy of Adepts residing in the Himalayas. The precise location is not made known, although there are several references to the Tibetan town of Shigatse, the

modern spelling of Tzigadze or Tchugadze, as spelled in the letters. There are hints in the letters that other Adept fraternities are located elsewhere in the world, but no specific information is given.

Much more might be said of the Mahatmas, but many first-hand impressions will be gained as the letters are studied.

One final point should be made here. The fact that the past tense is used in writing about the Mahatmas in no way means that they are no longer living. The events surrounding the letters took place in an earlier century and, of course, must be so described. The fact that the Masters still exist and influence the world for the better is a firmly held belief by many people, including many Theosophists, although such belief is not a requirement for membership in the Theosophical Society.

QUESTIONS

1. In what way, if at all, has this lesson changed your conception of a Mahatma?
2. What are the difficulties in recognizing a Mahatma?
3. What traits can you discern which might have a special impact on you?
4. What are some of the distinctions between a genuine Mahatma and one who falsely claims to be one?
5. Describe the backgrounds of the two Mahatmas who wrote the letters.

In group study, discussion might center on some question such as the following: Having in mind that the Mahatmas must work through individuals in bringing about great movements and events which help onward the evolution of the human race, what persons, movements, or events in history might be considered to show evidence of their influence?

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Abdill, *Adepts: Our Brothers*, audio CD.

Barborka, *The Mahatmas and Their Letters*, pp. 353–55, chs. 1 “On the Genius of Mahatmas” and 2 “On the Authenticity of the Mahatmas.”

Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. 8, pp. 392-403.

Codd, *Theosophy as the Masters See It*.

Hanson, *Masters and Men*.

Jinarajadasa, *The Early Teachings of the Masters*.

Leadbeater, *The Masters and the Path*.

Neff, *The “Brothers” of Madame Blavatsky*. The whole book is valuable on the subject.

Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, ch. 1 “Esoteric Teachers.”

_____, *The Occult World*, ch. 1 “The Theosophical Society.”

CHAPTER 2

Some Pertinent Questions

Several questions now arise. Just what *are* the letters? When were they written? To whom were they addressed? How did the correspondence come about? How was it carried on between Adepts living in Tibet and persons residing in other parts of the world? Why are the letters important?

The letters are responses by the Mahatmas K.H. and M. to letters addressed to them by two Englishmen living in India¹ during the 1880s, although a very few letters involving correspondence with other individuals are included in the volume. This correspondence covered a period from 1880 through 1885 (see the chronological listing in Appendix A). Many of the letters concern incidents and personalities prominent in the development of the Theosophical Society during its early days in India. Others deal directly with the affairs of the Society or with the philosophy of which the Brotherhood was custodian and which the two Mahatmas were attempting to make intelligible to the Englishmen. The Question and Answer letters are especially valuable in presenting this philosophy.

The Mahatmas had great difficulty finding suitable terms in English to convey the

meaning of many of the concepts. Several times they advised the Englishmen to develop a nomenclature that could be agreed upon and which could be used in discussing concepts so strange and new to Westerners.

Alfred Percy Sinnett, to whom most of the letters are addressed, was the respected editor of *The Pioneer*, a leading Anglo-Indian newspaper published in Allahabad, India. A few letters are directed to Sinnett's friend and colleague, Allan Octavian Hume, a member of the government and a noted ornithologist, who maintained a museum in his large home known as Jakko Hill in Simla. Mr. Hume received a number of letters, which are not found in the published volume. He permitted Mr. Sinnett to make copies of some of these, and Sinnett included them with his own letters, carefully preserved throughout the entire period and later deposited in the British Museum in London, where they are held in perpetuity by irrevocable deed.

The story of how the letters came to be written is told in some detail in *The Occult World* by A. P. Sinnett and in *Masters and Men* by Virginia Hanson. The salient facts are these:

In late 1878, H. P. Blavatsky and Col. H. S. Olcott, who had founded the Theosophical Society in New York City in November of 1875, decided to move the Society's headquarters to India. They arrived in Bombay in February 1879. The English community in India largely ignored them, but many prominent Indians welcomed them with interest and cordiality. HPB won some attention in the press (most of it unfavorable) by the performance of some startling phenomena.

The founders had been in Bombay only nine days when they received a letter from Mr. Sinnett. He was much interested in occult phenomena, having witnessed some manifestations while still living in England, and he desired to get in touch with H. P. Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott with a view to pursuing this interest. He invited them to stop at his home in Allahabad if they should ever come to that city. A lively correspondence ensued and a friendly relationship was established.

In October of 1879 the founders visited the Sinnetts in Allahabad. At this time they met several other interested persons: Mr. Hume and his wife Moggy from Simla, and Lt. Col. W. Gordon and his wife Alice from Calcutta, who also were visiting in Allahabad. All these people subsequently joined the Theosophical Society.

The following year the founders visited the Sinnetts in their summer home in Simla, the then summer capital of India. Here Blavatsky performed some amazing phenomena.² She gave credit for these to the two Adepts, or Masters, under whom she had trained in Tibet some years pre-

viously and with whom she remained in constant touch. Mr. Sinnett asked HPB to put him in communication with these personages, as he was extremely eager to learn the whole rationale of what was taking place and, if possible, be instructed in the occult doctrines (he had a further motive, which will be described in the next lesson). She hesitated but finally agreed to try. She was not immediately successful; the Adept with whom she was linked in a Master-pupil relationship (the Master Morya) refused point blank to have anything to do with the undertaking (ML 210/208; C-31).³ It happened, however, that the Mahatma K.H. had been looking for a channel through which some of the teachings might be made more widely available, and perhaps even for some relaxation of the rigid rules by which the Brotherhood was governed (ML 352/345-6; C-422).⁴ He agreed to undertake a limited correspondence with the Englishman, and the letters with which this study guide is concerned were the result.

Most of the correspondence was carried on through HPB by a process known as "psychological telegraphy." She explains:

An electro-magnetic connection, so to say, exists on the psychological plane between a Mahatma and his chelas, one of whom acts as his amanuensis. When the Master wants a letter to be written in this way, he draws the attention of the chela whom he selects for the task by causing an astral bell . . . to be rung near him, just as the dispatching telegraph office signals to the receiving office before wiring the message. The thoughts arising in the mind of the Mahatma are then clothed in

words, pronounced mentally, and forced along the astral currents he sends toward the pupil to impinge on the brain of the latter. Hence they are borne by the nerve-currents to the palms of his hands and the tips of his fingers, which rest on a piece of magnetically prepared paper (CW, 6:120).

The occult process by which the words themselves appear on the paper is called *precipitation*. This is an extremely involved process, and the student is urged to read the section on this subject in *The Mahatmas and Their Letters* by Geoffrey A. Barborka, pp. 109–122. In a conversation with the author Charles Johnston, HPB says that one would have to be clairvoyant to understand this process fully (*Collected Writings*, 8:397–8).

The Mahatma K.H. commented in one of his letters: “When science will have learned more about the mystery of the lithophyl (or lithobiblion) and how the impress of leaves comes originally to take place on stones, then will I be able to make you better understand the process” (ML 22/22; C-37).

For a time during the course of the correspondence, due to some unfortunate circumstances, the Mahatma K.H. was forbidden by his superiors to use the precipitation method and had to write out his letters in longhand (ML 296/291; C-231). Later, it is understood that permission was restored.

Some of the letters from the Mahatmas came by more conventional means, through several individuals, by hand delivery, and even by regular post.

One method by which HPB transmitted letters to the Mahatmas is described

in a letter from her to Mr. Sinnett (ML 470/462–63; C-445). She prefaces this description with the comment: “I have never, before beginning the service for you and Mr. Hume, transmitted and received letters to and from the Masters except for myself. If you had any idea of the difficulties, or the modus operandi, you would not have consented to be in my place. And yet I have never refused.”⁵

Two paragraphs further on, ten lines down in the paragraph, she describes what she calls “mechanical thought transference.” The student should read this explanation—but not, at this point, the remainder of the letter, as it concerns matters that developed rather late in the correspondence and would only be confusing here.

In commenting on this explanation, Geoffrey A. Barborka, in *The Mahatmas and Their Letters* (p. 57), observes that the processes involved in the transmission are not fully explained and that obviously HPB had her reasons for this. It may be in part because of the secrecy which had been imposed upon her when she left her training in Tibet, but also it may have been that she simply could not explain any more than one could explain calculus, or even geometry, to a child entering kindergarten.

The greatest difficulty in explaining occult processes lies in the fact that such explanations are almost meaningless to one who hasn’t developed the capacity to use these processes. In a letter to Mr. Hume, the Mahatma K.H. comments: “You do not seem to realize the tremendous difficulties in the way of explaining even the rudiments of *our* science to those who have been

trained in the familiar methods of yours . . . the more you have of the one, the less capable you are of instinctively comprehending the other, for a man can only think in his worn grooves, and unless he has the courage to fill up these and make new ones for himself, he must perforce travel on the old lines” (OW, p. 112).

In another place the Master K.H. says: “The truth is that till the neophyte attains to the condition necessary for that degree of illumination to which, and for which, he is entitled and fitted, most *if not all* of the secrets are incommunicable . . . the illumination must come from within” (ML 283/278; C-72).

It is impossible to detail all the reasons why the letters are important, for the message they carry to each individual who stud-

ies them will depend to some extent upon what that individual brings to the study. They do, however, constitute almost the first modern exposition of the wisdom tradition, great as were the difficulties of developing a vocabulary that would make the concepts even partially comprehensible to persons thoroughly steeped in the culture and traditions of the West. To quote from page xvi in the preface to the third edition (and it is recommended that the student read carefully all prefaces and introductions):

. . . the Letters are their own authority for the principles they teach, and that teaching, whether of doctrine or of the inner life and the nature of probation, is one with that of ‘HPB’, who was the founder of the Theosophical Movement and the Masters’ chosen and beloved pupil, agent, and scribe.

QUESTIONS

1. Why did the Mahatmas choose to respond to Sinnett at all?
2. Is the method of transmission and reception of the letters really important?
3. What is meant by “the letters are their own authority for the principles they teach”?
4. State your opinion of the importance of the letters at this point in your study. Be prepared, as you proceed with the chapters, to examine whether or in what ways that opinion becomes modified.
5. In what ways, if at all, can you elaborate on the descriptions of the methods used in carrying on the correspondence?
6. After doing supplementary readings, answer in your own words the six questions asked in the first paragraph of this chapter.

For group study, members could be assigned some of the following references. Good discussion could be developed on the importance of the letters, and a few more questions are listed if the group would like to discuss them in addition to those above.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Barborka, *The Mahatmas and Their Letters*, chs. 4 “How the Correspondence Originated” and 7 “On the Precipitation of the Mahatma Letters.”

Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. 8, Interview with Charles Johnston, pp. 397–8.

Hanson, *Masters and Men*, chs. 1 “1879,” 2 “Simla,” and 3 “The First Letter.”

Hodson, *Are There Perfected Men on Earth?*, audio CD.

Jinarajadasa, *The K.H. Letters to C. W. Leadbeater*.

_____, *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, First and Second Series.

Mills, *The Mahatma Letters to Mr. A. P. Sinnett*, Pts. 1-2, audio CD.

Sinnett, *The Occult World*, ch. 3 “Recent Occult Phenomena.”

CHAPTER 3

The First Letter

The remarkable phenomena which HPB performed during the Simla visit did not meet with universal acceptance. In fact, the reaction in some quarters was virulently negative. Sinnett himself was convinced of the genuineness of these phenomena and of HPB's good faith. He wrote rather strongly of the situation in *The Occult World*:

No history of Columbus in chains for having discovered a new world, or Galileo in prison for announcing the true principles of astronomy, is more remarkable for those who know . . . than the sight of Madame Blavatsky, slandered and ridiculed by most of the Anglo-Indian papers, and spoken of as a charlatan by the commonplace crowd, in return for having freely offered them some of the wonderful fruits . . . of the lifelong struggle in which she has conquered her extraordinary knowledge (p. 36).

As a result of all this, Sinnett began to feel that if some absolutely foolproof phenomenon could be produced—something that even the most dyed-in-the-wool skeptic could not deny—it might be possible to convince the doubters. He believed, too, that HPB had not surrounded the phenomena with sufficient safeguards to as-

sure that no opening had been left through which their validity could be questioned.

As he pondered this factor, he began to develop an idea which he thought might serve such a purpose, and it was this idea which he presented to the Mahatma in his first letter. His suggestion was the production, in India, in the presence of the group at Simla, of a copy of that day's issue of the *London Times*, and the simultaneous production, in London, of that day's issue of *The Pioneer*, the paper of which he was the editor. To fully appreciate the impact of such an experiment, the modern reader may recall that in 1880 there were no satellite communications, fax machines, Internet connections, or any of the other communication technologies that have become commonplace today.

Since Sinnett did not know to whom his letter was to be transmitted, he addressed it "To the Unknown Brother" and gave it to HPB for delivery.

Several days went by before he had a reply. In the meantime, HPB informed him that she had found one of the Mahatmas willing to be placed in communication with him. This encouraged him greatly but he

began to wonder whether he had presented his case as well as he might have done, so he wrote a second letter, elaborating somewhat on his proposal and redefining it to his better satisfaction. HPB accepted this letter also for transmittal.

A few days later, Sinnett found on his writing table his reply from the Mahatma Koot Hoomi.¹ As all who have dipped into the *Mahatma Letters* will know, the first sentence of this reply brings a shock: "Precisely because the test of the London newspaper would close the mouths of the skeptics—it is unthinkable." Imagine how Sinnett must have felt at receiving such a sharp refusal to adopt his suggestion, but consider some of the reasons for this refusal as outlined by the Mahatma.

Much was made of the matter of skepticism. A bit further on in the letter (p. 4) the Mahatma makes the following comment:

The only salvation of the genuine proficients in occult sciences lies in the skepticism of the public: the charlatans and the jugglers are the natural shields of the "adepts." The public safety is only ensured by our keeping secret the terrible weapons which might be used against it . . .

Elsewhere in the letters there are statements which not only hint at but, at times, speak frankly of the necessity for skepticism at this stage of the world's evolution. For example:

We do not wish Mr. Hume or you to prove conclusively to the public that we really exist. Please realize the fact that so long as men doubt there will be curiosity and enquiry, and that enquiry stimulates reflection that begets effort; but let our secret be once thoroughly vulgarized, and not

only will skeptical society derive no great good but our privacy would be constantly endangered and have to be continually guarded at an unreasonable cost of power (ML 227/224; C-93).

Here, as so often throughout the book, we get a hint of how the Masters work. Their power, while tremendous, is not unlimited, and they cannot lawfully squander it.

There was another reason for the rejection of Mr. Sinnett's suggestion. The Master pointed out that the results of such a phenomenon would be disastrous. Science would be unable to account for it and therefore totally unwilling to accept it. The masses would think it a miracle and the whole thing would be a "fatal trap." This would be true not only for the one who had opened the door (Sinnett himself) but also for HPB, who would be placed in a position leading to notoriety and consequent vilification and slander.

Were we to accede to your desires know you really what consequences would follow in the trail of success? The inexorable shadow which follows all human innovations moves on, yet few are they who are ever conscious of its approach and dangers.²

The Mahatma then commented on human nature in general and the reactions that might be expected from the masses if such a phenomenon were to take place. (Read pages 3 and 4 of the *Letters*—all editions)

At the bottom of page 4 there is a brief sentence which it would be easy to miss: "I listened attentively to the conversation

which took place at Mr. Hume's . . ." This seems a rather casual comment, but apparently something was said that caught his attention and he became aware of the conversation. The fact that the Master was thousands of miles away, and the conversation took place in Simla, seemed not to have posed any particular problem. Obviously it was mental, rather than aural, listening.

On page 5 of Letter 1 (all editions), the Mahatma referred to three of the phenomena which had taken place at Simla. For explanations of these phenomena see *The Occult World*, p. 54 et seq. (the note); p. 58 et seq. (the cup and saucer);³ and p. 68 et seq. (the brooch). Page numbers refer to the 9th edition.

Sinnett was advised by the Mahatma to notify the public of these incidents. He had already published a statement of the brooch incident, attested by nine witnesses, but the Mahatma did not consider this adequate. He stated that if the public were set to working on explanations of the phenomena, it would be prepared for further possibilities.

The letter closed with the admonition to "TRY" and assured the Englishman that if he would work on the material he already had, "we will be the first to help you get further evidence."

The fact that the Mahatma used the pronoun "we" implied that others might be willing to help, although no other had been willing to undertake direct instruction of the Englishman. It seems probable that the Mahatma M. was even then interested in the possibilities of the correspon-

dence. In a letter written much later, the Mahatma K.H. commented, "... remember that my Brother and I are the only [ones] among the Brotherhood who have at heart the dissemination (to a certain limit) of our doctrines . . ." (ML 367/361; C-435). As pointed out in endnote 3 of Chapter 2, the Mahatma M. later took over the correspondence for a time.

Although Sinnett was disappointed in the Mahatma's refusal to perform the phenomena suggested, he came to understand that he had asked for precisely the kind of demonstration which, according to the rules of the Brotherhood, they were prohibited from giving. As Sinnett himself commented, "the display of any occult phenomenon for the purpose of exciting the wonder and admiration of beholders is strictly forbidden" (OW, p. 25). The Mahatma at one time mentioned "the unpassable Chinese wall of rules and Law" by which the Adept Brotherhood was bound (ML 376/369; C-156).

It should be remembered that, in those days, the Eastern occult knowledge was carefully guarded. In fact, the Mahatmas were later accused by Mr. Hume of colossal selfishness in this regard. This was not the case, of course, but they were prevented by their rules from prematurely disclosing knowledge. "... it is absolutely necessary," said the Mahatma K.H. at one point, "that those who would have . . . knowledge should be *thoroughly* tried and tested" (ML 367/361; C-435).

The Mahatma K.H. commented to Sinnett, in one of the letters, that he himself was "the only one to attempt and persevere

in my idea of the necessity of, at least, a small reform, of however slight a relaxation from the extreme rigidity of our regulations if we would see European Theosophists increase and work for the enlightenment and good of humanity” (ML 352/346; C-423). He did not feel that he had succeeded very well in this. In fact, he felt he had failed to achieve all that he thought was necessary. “All I could obtain,” he said, “was to be allowed to communicate with a few . . . You, foremost of all, since I had chosen you as the exponent of our doctrine that we had determined to give out to the world—to some extent at least” (ML 352/346; C-423).

Another thing to be kept in mind, when people ask why the Masters permitted certain things to happen, is that they were entirely limited by the karma of the individuals with whom and through whom they worked. There are numerous references in the letters that make this quite clear. (Watch for these hints and make a note of them.) They do not interfere with karma, yet in one sense they take some of the burden of the karma of the persons who come under their influence. The Master K.H. once commented:

Verily, good friend, your Karma is ours, for you imprinted it daily and hourly upon the pages of that book where the minutest particulars of the individuals stepping inside our circle are preserved . . . In thought and deed, by day, in soul-struggles by nights, you have been writing the story of your desires and your spiritual

development. This everyone does who approaches us with any desire to become our co-worker (ML 267/263; C-131).

It is impossible to study the *Mahatma Letters* without becoming convinced that the Brotherhood uses everyone, no matter how unpromising the individual may look from the ordinary point of view. The Mahatma K.H. pointed out to Mr. Sinnett that, in choosing HPB to be their messenger, they had searched for a hundred years to find a suitable person through whom the knowledge might be carried to the West. She was far from perfect, he said, but she was the best available (ML 203/201; C-79).

So it would seem that if one has a particular talent, or any special attribute which can be used for the progress of mankind, regardless of how unpromising other characteristics may be, the Masters use that attribute, sometimes even without the individual’s own knowledge. One very interesting instance of an unconscious agent of the Brotherhood was a certain D. M. Bennett, an American, who visited the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in India in the course of a world tour to observe the practical working of Christianity. He seemed a most unlikely subject—crude in his manners and uncouth in appearance. But he was a freethinker, passionately devoted to the cause of freedom of thought. Read Chapter 9 of *Masters and Men*, which tells this very interesting story.⁴

QUESTIONS

1. What was the reaction of the public to HPB's phenomena?
2. Describe in your own words the reasons given by the Mahatma K.H. for refusing to adopt Sinnett's proposal.
3. Describe your own reaction to this refusal.
4. How does individual karma influence the Mahatma's ability to make full use of any individual?
5. How do the Mahatmas use the talents of individuals in their efforts to enfranchise the West from bigotry, intolerance, and materialism?
6. Can you suggest to yourself a talent or attribute which you might privately offer to the Mahatmas for the service of humanity at this stage of your quest? (This question may be considered privately.)
7. What do you think was the long-range result of HPB's phenomena in view of the public reaction? What was the purpose behind doing any phenomena at all at that time?
8. Read ML 352/346; C-423. The Master tells Sinnett his intuition is not yet awakened. How can we awaken it? How would study of the *Mahatma Letters* help awaken intuition?

In group study, different members might present descriptions of the various phenomena performed at Simla by HPB as described in *The Occult World*. Further interesting discussion might be developed around the subject of individual karma as a factor in the ability of the Mahatmas to work with an individual.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Abdill, *The Mahatma Letters*, Pts. 1-6, audio CD.

Barborka, *The Mahatmas and Their Letters*, chs. 5 "The First Mahatma Letter to A. O. Hume," 6 "How A. P. Sinnett Received the *Mahatma Letters*," and 7 "A Study of the First Letter." This last chapter includes short biographical sketches of persons mentioned in the letter and discusses some of the subjects mentioned.

Kunz, *The Masters of the Wisdom*, audio CD.

_____, *The Masters and the Future of the Theosophical Society*, audio CD.

CHAPTER 4

Philosophical Teachings

At the outset Mr. Sinnett and Mr. Hume were primarily interested in occult phenomena rather than in the profound philosophy of the East. As a matter of fact, when they considered the establishment of a branch of the Theosophical Society at Simla¹ their idea was to concentrate wholly on the study of the occult without regard for any other aims which the Society might have. They proposed, in effect, to form “a kind of club or ‘school of magic’” (ML 209/207; C-30) and even went so far as to contemplate establishing a separate society altogether in order to be free of “interference” from Colonel Olcott and HPB. Their proposal carried the suggestion that a member of the Brotherhood might be selected to take the new body “under his patronage” and to be in “free and direct communication with its leaders,” affording them “direct proof that he really possessed that superior knowledge of the forces of nature and the attributes of the human soul which would inspire them with proper confidence in his leadership” (ML 8/8; C-8).

This proposal, put to the Mahatma K.H., was promptly rejected. If the new

society was formed, the Mahatma said, it would have to be as a regular branch of the Theosophical Society. He added that neither Colonel Olcott nor HPB had “the least inclination to interfere.” He also indicated the reasons why it would be impossible to assign a “Brother” to the group (ML 8-10/8-10; C-8-9).

Later, in a letter to Mr. Hume, the Mahatma K.H. referred again to this matter, pointing out the conditions under which the formation of the Simla Society could be approved and saying, “a ‘hot-bed of magick’ [*sic*] we never dreamt of. Such an organization . . . is unthinkable . . .” (ML 209/207; C-30).

This background is necessary for understanding a comment made by the Mahatma K.H. in a letter written in December of 1880 which gives the key to his own intentions and sets forth the conditions under which the correspondence will be continued: “And now it is your province to decide which will you have: the highest philosophy or simple exhibitions of occult powers” (ML 24/24; C-39).

The Englishmen must have recognized the wisdom of the Mahatma’s dictum, for,

as the correspondence progressed, they posed some profound philosophical and metaphysical questions in their letters. The Mahatmas answered these so far as they were permitted by their rules to divulge the information and within the limitations of language difficulties. The question and answer interchanges are found in the section of the second and third editions headed “Philosophical and Theoretical Teachings.”² Fortunately, in most instances, both sides of the correspondence are included in the Q & A letters, and this makes for much better understanding of the subjects discussed.

Commentaries on all these teachings are obviously beyond the scope of this study guide, if only for reasons of space as they cover many pages of the book. Nor is it necessary, at this point, for the student to master these subjects; they are too complex and ramified for easy assimilation. Previous familiarity with Theosophical concepts will be helpful, of course, although it must always be remembered that the vocabulary may be different; at the time the letters were written no standard nomenclature had been adopted. Other resource material will be helpful, especially *Esoteric Buddhism*, in which Sinnett systematized many of the teachings. No amount of supplementary reading, however, should prevent the student from eventually coming to immediate grips with the philosophy as given directly by the great teachers themselves. What is not understood should not be rejected but simply put “in suspension” for the time being. A later return to the concept may bring a whole new comprehension; this

is frequently the case in the study of the esoteric philosophy. One indispensable item is a glossary, since many Sanskrit and Tibetan words are used. Most Theosophical libraries have a number of these. *The Theosophical Glossary* by HPB is valuable. So also are several others: *Sanskrit Keys to the Wisdom Religion* by Judith Tyberg; *Occult Glossary* by Gottfried de Purucker; *Key Words of the Wisdom Tradition* edited by Laurence J. Bendit; *Glossary of Sanskrit Terms* by Geoffrey A. Barborka. Perhaps the most comprehensive is the first named.

At one time, late in 1881, while the Mahatma K.H. was on his three-month retreat,³ the Mahatma M. took over the correspondence. Mr. Hume directed some penetrating questions to him, which he answered. Mr. Sinnett copied these answers in his own notebook. They were not included in early editions of *The Mahatma Letters* but will be found as Appendix II in *The H. P. Blavatsky Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, pp. 376 et seq.⁴ This material is now printed as Appendix III in the chronological edition.

By this time, the Mahatma K.H. had returned from his retreat, but Sinnett had not yet been informed of this fact. However, before he received a reply to his series of questions, a letter came to him from the high chela Djual Khul saying, “The Master has awaked and bids me write” (ML 248/245; C-105).⁵ It is a moving letter and will repay some study. In it, Djual Khul commented that the Master K.H. begged Mr. Sinnett “not to be giving up in despair” at the notes which the Mahatma M. would be sending him, “the more so as M. Sahib’s only hatred in his life is for writing.”

When, in January 1882, Sinnett finally received the “notes” from the Mahatma M., he understood this admonition. The explanations given were by far the most technical he had yet received and appeared in a document headed “Cosmological Notes and Queries and M’s Replies” (ML 70/70; C-118). After Sinnett had mastered the explanations given, he was able to use them in a series of articles he was writing for *The Theosophist*⁶ and later, to incorporate them in his second book *Esoteric Buddhism*, published in 1883.

Before studying this letter in detail, the student should have some comprehension of the doctrine of cycles, chains, rounds, and globes, etc. Chapters 3 and 4 of *Esoteric Buddhism* deal with these subjects, and extensive information is given in *The Secret Doctrine* by H. P. Blavatsky. The 1979 edition of the latter work contains an exhaustive index and it is relatively easy to identify commentaries on the different concepts.

A few comments in the Mahatma M.’s letter of a less technical nature may be quoted here. In his answer to Sinnett’s first question concerning the cycle of worlds, the Master wrote:

Nothing in nature springs into existence suddenly, all being subjected to the same law of gradual evolution. Realize but once the process of the *maha* [great] cycle, of one sphere and you have realized them all. One man is born like another man, one race evolves, develops, and declines like all other races. Nature follows the same groove from the “creation” of a universe down to that of a mosquito.⁷ In studying esoteric cosmogony, keep a spiritual eye on the physiological process of human

birth; proceed from cause to effect, establishing as you go along, analogies between the birth of a man and that of a world. . . . Cosmology is the physiology of the universe spiritualized, for there is but one law (ML 70/70; C-118).⁸

In response to Mr. Sinnett’s fourth question concerning evolutionary cycles, the Master began by saying: “The evolution of the worlds cannot be considered apart from the evolution of everything created or having being in those worlds.” He pointed out the fallacy of the ordinary idea of the creation of the world and described both planet and man as “states for a given time.” Using the analogy of an octave on the piano, he set the concept within the understanding of the ordinary person.

In his question, Sinnett had asked whether there is something in the life of even a vegetable which, though not responsible, might lead it forward or backward in its evolution. The Mahatma replied that there is no responsibility until matter and spirit are properly “equilibrizd” in the human being. This, to some extent, would answer the question so frequently asked concerning whether there is karma for the so-called lower forms of life. Obviously there is no individual karma, according to the Mahatma, since there is no individual self to be responsible. Undoubtedly, however, every living thing is affected, since the Mahatma pointed out that “there is but one law,” and that law always operates to preserve the balance of the universe. This is one example of the many questions that may be posed for discussion as a result of the study of this letter.

Another letter which should be recommended for special study is the so-called “Devachan Letter.” Chronologically, it is Letter 68, but as the letters are arranged in the earlier editions of the book, it is number 16 (ML 99/97; C-189). This should be followed by a study of Letter 25 (Letter 104, chronologically) beginning on page 191 in the second edition and on page 188 in the third edition. The Englishmen were not quite satisfied with the answers given in Letter 16 (chron. 68) and forwarded further questions to the Mahatma. Letter 25 (chron. 104) contains the answers to those further questions. Unfortunately, in this second letter, the questions and answers are not so clearly separated, some of the questions not being specifically numbered or identified but rather implied in the answers. Careful study, however, will clarify this difficulty.⁹

In the main, these two letters concern after-death states, and specifically that state of consciousness (not a place) called *Devachan*, in which the Ego¹⁰ reaps the happy fruit of all the good which it has lived, felt, spoken, or done in the previous earth-life. No sorrow can enter the Egoic consciousness in Devachan. It is a period of varying lengths of “time” (although time itself does not exist at that level of consciousness: “There are no clocks, no timepieces in devachan,” says the Master), for the harvest of bliss is compensatory for the good sown during the earth life, and this obviously varies with individuals.

Sinnett had suggested that there is a close resemblance between Devachan and the Heaven of ordinary religion—omitting

the ideas of an anthropomorphic God. The Mahatma contradicted this and said there is no resemblance between them. However, the conclusion one draws on this point will probably depend somewhat upon one’s concept of heaven. Some aspects of Devachan as described in these two letters do seem similar to the usual idea of Heaven. This is something to think about. The student may find it of interest to compare these descriptions with their own ideas concerning this phase of the after-life.

The “Cosmological Notes” and the letters on Devachan are perhaps the most technical in the book, although they are not by any means the only letters dealing with philosophical and metaphysical subjects. These appear here and there in connection with discussions of other matters. The quotations and comments cited here are mere samplings. Depending upon the seriousness with which this study is pursued, the question and answer letters are especially recommended for one who wishes to understand the Mahatmas’ views on these more abstruse subjects. Patience and perseverance are essential. The study of *The Mahatma Letters* can occupy a lifetime, and there should be no discouragement because of apparent lack of progress. The teachings cannot be taken in one gulp or assimilated in one sitting; they are something to return to again and again through the years for increasing enlightenment, never-ending fascination, and an ever-growing conviction of their validity.

The method of teaching in the letters is said to be characteristic of the East at that time. The pupil asked questions; the teach-

er answered them. In that tradition, the teacher did not select predetermined subjects to be taught, nor did they voluntarily offer long discourses on subjects about which the pupil had not inquired.

The Q & A letters, as numbered in the second and third editions of the book, are as follows: Letters 13–18 inclusive (chronologically 44, 66, 67, 68, 61, 62 respectively); Letter 19 (chron. 71) is a short letter answering one specific question; the three letters 20A, B, and C (chron. 70A, B, C respectively) are connected: 20A (C-70A) is a letter from A. O. Hume to the Mahatma K.H. concerning some points made in the Devachan Letter (16; C-68);¹¹ 20B (C-70B)

is a letter from Sinnett to HPB asking some questions inspired by an article by Eliphas Levi published in *The Theosophist*; and 20C (C-70C) is the Mahatma K.H.'s reply to these questions, written on the back of Sinnett's letter to HPB (20B; C-70B) and containing also answers to the questions asked by Mr. Hume in 20A (C-70A); Letters 21 and 22 (C-76 and 90) are Q & A letters, as are 23A and B (C-93A and B), and 24A and B (C-85A and B). No. 25 (C-104) is the second Devachan Letter.

If the student understands the chronological sequence, the contents of the letters may become more comprehensible.

QUESTIONS

1. How did the Mahatmas present their philosophy to the two Englishmen?
2. What were some of the difficulties involved?
3. Without attempting to go into detail, what are some of the subjects dealt with in the Q & A letters?
4. Select one topic, either from Letter 13 (C-44) or one of the other Q & A letters, and discuss it in your own words.
5. State your own idea concerning a comparison of Devachan and the usual ideas of Heaven.
6. State your own opinion on the subject of karma in the pre-human kingdoms after reading the Mahatma's answer in response to Sinnett's fourth question in Letter 13 (C-44).

For group study, consideration might also be given to the statement in ML, p. 110/107; C-198: "You can do nothing better than to study the two doctrines—of Karma and Nirvana—as profoundly as you can." The group might also make a comparison between Devachan and the traditional ideas of Heaven.

The two Devachan Letters in the *Mahatma Letters* are Letters 16 (chron. 68) and 25 (chron. 104); the group may like to read them in their entirety instead of just the quotes given in this guide.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Barker, *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*, Appendix II “Cosmological Notes” (see Appendix C of this guide for part of it).

Blavatsky, *Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge*.

Mills, *Philosophical Teachings in the Mahatma Letters*, Pts. 1-6, audio CD.

Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, chs. 3 “The Planetary Chain,” 4 “The World Periods,” 5 “Devachan,” 6 “Kama Loka,” 11 “The Universe,” and 12 “The Doctrine Reviewed.”

Probation and Chelaship

The Mahatma ideal is widely and deeply held in the East, and more and more thinking people in the West are coming to accept its reality as a natural and inevitable outgrowth of the evolutionary process. Some are content to wait and let evolution bring about the necessary developments; others, as they become spiritually awakened, begin to realize that spiritual evolution itself depends upon the presence in the world of such enlightened and compassionate beings, and that attaining that status is indeed the *summum bonum*. Eventually, this realization becomes increasingly transformed from a personal incentive into a profound compassion for the world and a longing to grow in knowledge and wisdom so that greater help may be given to fellow humans in the long evolutionary struggle. The concept of the “Path” comes to dominate the lives of these aspirants and they begin that search which, if pursued with zeal and perseverance, brings them to the point of discipleship—or *chelaship*, as it is termed in the East—and eventually to stages beyond. It is not necessary to go to the Himalayas or anywhere else, physically. The geography

of the spirit alone is concerned, and that is wholly inward.

Although the futility of a life of easy personal self-indulgence quickly becomes apparent, this does not mean that the battle is won. The individual is still faced with the difficult struggle to overcome self-serving attitudes and habits built into one’s character through countless incarnations. That was a necessary process, for only so can we develop the innate capacities and powers which must now be used for the benefit of all life, not exclusively for our own satisfaction. Making that shift in emphasis is the crucial test, and some inevitably fail. Essential to the search is a period during which repeated tests have to be met, wisdom has to be gained, and strengths have to be developed for the greater tasks that lie ahead. This period is called probation and chelaship.

In the book which is the subject of this study guide, the two Mahatmas have a great deal to say on the subject of discipleship and probation through which every neophyte must pass before they can become an accepted chela and a candidate for the great Initiations which lead to Adeptship.

Quite a number of letters may be grouped under that heading, although they contain innumerable references to other subjects. Furthermore, the requirements for chelaship are mentioned frequently throughout the book; one comes upon these passages unexpectedly in many places.

The selections given in this lesson are significant, but that is not to say they are the only noteworthy comments on this subject in the book. Reading the entire paragraph from which the quotation is taken will often bring rich rewards. The student will wish to be alert to other pertinent statements dealing with chelaship, for valuable hints are there for the earnest seeker to discover.

It seems fitting to begin with one statement found quite early in the book:

The door is always opened to the right man who knocks. And we invariably welcome the newcomer; only, instead of going over to him, he has to come to us. More than that; unless he has reached that point in the path of occultism from which return is impossible, by his having irrevocably pledged himself to our association, we never—except in cases of utmost moment—visit him or even cross the threshold of his door in visible appearance (ML 8/8; C-8).

So we cannot expect a Mahatma to appear on our doorstep and ask us to become his disciple. As a matter of fact, we cannot expect such a visitation at any time. Throughout the entire period covered by the letters, the two Englishmen never saw or came in personal contact with the two Mahatmas with whom they corresponded. They were never, as a matter of fact, accept-

ed into full chelaship but were more in the nature of “lay chelas.” They had not given themselves wholly to discipleship, as both had many responsibilities still to meet in the world. Mr. Hume at one time offered to give up everything if he could be taught the rules of occultism, but the conditions surrounding his offer were such that it was not accepted. Mr. Sinnett found it impossible to deny himself certain indulgences such as brandy, cigars, and other worldly luxuries that he felt necessary to his way of life but which are inimical to such an association. The Mahatmas did not criticize him for this. Quite early in their correspondence the Mahatma K.H. said to him:

I will not tell you to give up this or that, for unless you exhibit *beyond any doubt* the presence in you of the necessary germs it would be as useless as it would be cruel (ML 20/20; C-27).

This would seem to apply to every aspirant. The Mahatma stated elsewhere, however:

Is any so eager for knowledge and the beneficent powers it confers as to be ready to leave your world and come into ours? Then let him come; but he must not think to return until the seal of the mysteries has locked his lips even against chances of his own weakness and indiscretion. Let him come by all means, as the pupil to the master, and without conditions (ML 9/9; C-8).

This is perhaps as challenging and inspiring a passage as one might hope to find on this subject. For it must be remembered that, without any dissembling, the path of discipleship is a rigorous one. In the pas-

sages which follow, it will become quite clear that it is an undertaking to be approached not only with a determined will, but also with the utmost humility—demanding nothing, expecting nothing, but trying always to remain alert to catch the inner directions when they come. To do this it is important to examine every motive and action to see whether they contain even a tiny spark of that self-interest which is so destructive of spiritual progress. The Mahatma emphasizes this point:

Self-personality, vanity, and conceit harbored in the higher principles are enormously more dangerous than the same defects inherent only in the lower physical nature of man. They are the breakers against which the cause of chelaship, in its probationary stage, is sure to be dashed to pieces unless the would-be disciple carries with him the white shield of perfect confidence and trust in those he would seek out through mount and vale to guide him safely toward the light of knowledge (ML 359/353; C-441).

No doubt it is for this reason as well as for many others, that every aspirant must undergo this period called probation.

No one comes in contact with us [says the Mahatma K.H.] but has to submit to being tested and put by us on probation (ML 309/305; C-294).

Probation [is] something every chela who does not want to remain simply ornamental, has *nolens volens* to undergo for a more or less prolonged period (ML 230/227; C-221).

One very important factor, apparent from numerous statements, is that the Mahatmas do not impose their will upon disciples.

Nor are we especially anxious to have anyone work for us except with entire spontaneity. We want true and unselfish hearts; fearless and confiding souls (ML 214/212; C-34).

The fact is that to the last and supreme initiation, every chela . . . is left to his own device and counsel. We have to fight our own battles, and the familiar adage—"the adept *becomes*, he is *not made*"—is true to the letter. Since every one of us is the *creator* and producer of the *causes* that lead to such or some other *results*, we have to reap but what we have sown. *Our chelas are helped but when they are innocent of the causes that lead them into trouble*; when such causes are generated by foreign, outside influences. Life and the struggle for adeptship would be too easy had we all scavengers behind us to sweep away the effects we have generated through our own rashness and presumption (ML 309/305; C-294).

Reinforcing the above, other statements indicate the freedom of the disciple to work out their own salvation. Being on probation does not rob anyone of independence and initiative, even to the point of disagreeing with the Mahatma who is their guru:

The chela is at perfect liberty, *and often quite justified from the standpoint of appearances*—to suspect his Guru of being "a fraud" as the elegant word stands. More than that, the greater, the sincerer his indignation—whether expressed in words or boiling in his heart—the more fit he is, the better qualified to become an *adept*. He is free to, and will not be held to account, for using the most abusive words and expressions regarding his Guru's actions and orders, provided he comes out victorious from the fiery ordeal; provided he resists

all and every temptation; rejects every allurements, and proves that nothing, not even the promise of that which he holds dearer than life, of the most precious boon, his future adeptship—is unable to make him deviate from the path of truth and honesty, or force him to become a *deceiver* (ML 231/228; C-222).

The chela must, as a matter of fact, dredge up from the very depths all that they truly are—whether that be admirable or otherwise. All must be brought to the surface, viewed with such objectivity as can be mustered, and dealt with according to the degree of wisdom which has been attained.

The sole object of [some of the methods used is] drawing out the whole *inner* nature of the chela, most of the nooks and corners of which would remain dark and concealed forever, were not an opportunity afforded to test each of these corners in turn (ML 231/229; C-223).

The real nature of the chela has to be drawn out and brought to the surface. This is a rule with us as inexorable as it is disgusting in your Western sight,¹ and I could not prevent it if I would. It is not enough to know thoroughly what a chela is capable of doing or not doing at the time and under the circumstances during the period of probation. We have to know of what he *may* become capable under different and every kind of opportunities (ML 236/233; C-227).

The aspirant is . . . assailed entirely on the psychological side of his nature . . . to develop every germ of good and bad in him in his temperament. The rule is inflexible, and not one escapes whether he but writes to us a letter, or in the privacy of his own heart's thought formulates a strong desire for occult communication and knowledge

(ML 365/359; C-451-2).

These are the conditions of probation. The Mahatma does not withhold encouragement, however.

The pathway through earth-life leads through many conflicts and trials, but he who does naught to conquer them can expect no triumph. Let then the anticipation of a fuller introduction into our mysteries under more congenial circumstances—the creation of which depends *entirely upon yourself*—inspire you with patience to wait for, perseverance to press on to, and full preparation to receive the blissful consummation of all your desires (ML 258/254; C-117).

You will have first to promise me faithfully never to judge either of us, nor of the situation, nor of anything else bearing any relation to the “mythical Brothers”—tall or short, thick or thin—by your worldly experience or you will never come at the truth (ML 258/255; C-112).

No doubt the Mahatmas are more appreciative of a chela's efforts than may be apparent on the surface. At one time the Mahatma M. wrote to Mr. Hume:

You must not think that because *we have never shown any knowledge of what you have been doing*, nor because we have never acknowledged or thanked you for it in our letters—that we are either ungrateful for, or ignore purposely or otherwise what you have done, for it is really not so. For, though no one ought to be expecting thanks for doing his duty by humanity and the cause of truth—since, after all, he who labours for others, labours for himself—nevertheless, my Brother, I feel deeply grateful to you for what you have done (ML 239/236; C-229).²

At another time and in another connection, the Mahatma K.H. assured Mr. Sinnett: "Ingratitude is not one of our vices" (ML 9/9; C-9).

The Mahatmas were well aware of the insidious fascination of psychic phenomena for many people. This had always been a particular weakness for Mr. Sinnett. In the following letter, the Mahatma K.H. took occasion to warn him:

Try to break [through] the great *maya* against which occult students the world over have always been warned by their teachers—the hankering for phenomena. Like the thirst for drink and opium, it grows with gratification (ML 262/258; C-115).

Another factor enters into the Master/chela relationship. At one point the Mahatma K.H. commented:

The first element of success in a candidate [is] unshaken faith, once that his conviction rests upon and has taken root in knowledge, not simple belief in certain facts (ML 310/305; C-294).

It must, at times, be difficult to maintain this "unshaken faith" and chelas must always be on guard for tests, which often come from unexpected quarters.

We allow our candidates *to be tempted* in a thousand ways (ML 316/311; C-299).

The pressures of probation are particularly difficult because:

The mass of human sin and frailty is distributed throughout the life of a man who is content to remain an average mortal. It is gathered in and centered, so to say, within one period of the life of the chela—the period of probation (ML 359/354; C-441).

The Mahatmas, however, show great understanding of the struggles and problems of the chela:

Your strivings, perplexities, and forebodings are equally noticed . . . In the imperishable RECORD of the Masters *you have written them all*. Yea, verily, good friend, your *Karma* is ours for you imprinted it daily and hourly upon the pages of that book where the minutest particulars of the individuals stepping inside our circle are preserved . . . In thought and deed by day, in soul-struggles by nights, you have been writing the story of your desires and your spiritual development. This everyone does who approaches us with any earnestness of desire to become our co-worker (ML 267/262-3; C-131).

The Occult Science is *not* one in which secrets can be communicated of a sudden . . . The truth is that till the neophyte attains to the condition necessary for that degree of illumination to which, and for which, he is entitled and fitted, *most if not all* of the Secrets are incommunicable . . . The illumination *must come from within* (ML 282-83/278; C-72).

It is he alone who has the love of humanity at heart, who is capable of grasping thoroughly the idea of a regenerating practical Brotherhood who is entitled to the possession of our secrets . . . A man who places not the good of mankind above his own good is not worthy of becoming our chela (ML 252/248; C-100).

And then the assurance:

The keepers of the sacred light did not safely cross so many ages but to find themselves wrecked on the rocks of modern skepticism . . . We will always find volun-

teers to replace the tired sentries, and this world, bad as it is in its present transitory period, can yet furnish us with a few men now and then (ML 215/213; C-35).

It is obvious from various statements that the relation between a Mahatma and chela is an extremely sensitive and subtle one, and the actions of the latter may sometimes adversely affect the former.

I am . . . of the opinion that few candidates imagine the degree of inconvenience—nay suffering and harm to himself—the initiator submits to for the sake of his pupil. The peculiar physical, moral, and intellectual conditions of neophytes and Adepts alike vary much, as anyone will easily understand; thus, in each case, the instructor must adapt his conditions to those of the pupil, and the strain is terrible, for to achieve success we have to bring ourselves into *full* rapport with the subject under training (ML 283/279; C-73).

The misuse of knowledge by the pupil always reacts upon the initiator; nor do I believe you know yet that in shar-

ing his secrets with another, the Adept, by an immutable Law, is delaying his own progress to the Eternal Rest . . . it must strike you as a truism, that a *Price* must be paid for everything and every truth by *somebody*, and in this case—*WE* pay it. Fear not; I am willing to pay my share . . . if all this was more generally known to candidates for initiation, I feel certain they would be both more thankful and more patient as well as less inclined to be irritated at what they consider our reticence and vacillations (ML 284/280-1; C-74).

But there is always encouragement:

Be not discouraged that your practice falls below your aspiration, yet be not content with *admitting* this . . . Your spiritual progress is far greater than you know or can realize, and you do well to believe that such development is *in itself* more important than its realization by your physical brain consciousness (ML 372/366; C-419).

And finally, a message for everyone:

We have one word for all aspirants: TRY (ML 247/ 244; C-148).

QUESTIONS

1. Why are probation and chelaship necessary stages on the spiritual path?
2. Discuss some comment—not necessarily included in this lesson—from one of the letters on some phase of probation and chelaship which seems significant to you, explaining the reason for your selection.
3. What are some of the methods used by the Mahatmas to bring out the latent strengths and weaknesses of a chela?
4. There seems to be a fine line between the dissemination of the occult philosophy (which was the object of the correspondence) and revealing certain knowledge on which the disciple must “lock his lips.” Why, in your opinion, is this so?

5. What, in your view, is the crucial, or essential, factor which must be present in a chela before they can deny themselves the more worldly indulgences that have at one time seemed so necessary? Why is this important?
6. What do you feel should be the relationship between chela and Guru?

In group study, read the entire Letter 30 (C-74). Additional passages from the letters on the subject of this lesson could be discussed. In addition to dealing with the questions above, a useful topic might be the reasons why direct contact with a Mahatma is so rare an occurrence.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Besant, *The Path of Discipleship*.

Codd, *The Path to the Masters of Wisdom*, audio CD.

Hodson, *The Pathway to Perfection*.

_____, *Discipleship in Modern Days*, audio CD.

_____, *The Soul's Awakening*.

Leadbeater, *The Masters and the Path*.

Plummer, *Is Discipleship Possible in the West?*, audio CD.

CHAPTER 6

ADEPTSHIP

Obviously, information about that exalted status called “Adeptship” comes most authentically from the Adepts. Fortunately, the two authors of the letters with which this study guide is concerned (who were themselves Adepts) made a number of statements on the subject, and we can turn to these for enlightenment. No lengthy dissertations are given; invariably the comments are interpolated in the midst of discussions of other matters. But they are revealing and have the merit of coming from those who *know*.

Much more has been said on this subject. One has only to glance at the list of references to the subject in the index to *The Secret Doctrine* to realize how extremely complex it is. But the statements that come from the Mahatmas are direct, immediate, and explicit. Some of these will be considered.

An early comment on the subject—and one to which much thought might be given—comes in the second letter to Mr. Sinnett from the Mahatma K.H.:

The adept is the rare efflorescence of a generation of enquirers; and to become one, he must obey the inward impulse of his soul irrespective of the prudential con-

siderations of worldly science or sagacity (ML 6/6; C-6).

If we apply that standard to the conduct of the ordinary person, we can see how often most individuals fail to meet it. In all social, business, and even religious aspects of ordinary life, the individual is quite likely to dissemble, even—if when considered necessary—to be dishonest; to say the polite thing rather than the true thing; to do the comfortable, easy thing; to follow the course which seems least likely to get one into trouble (or most likely to extricate one if already in it); or twist the facts to suit one’s own convenience and preferences. How often will anyone bother to consult that “inward impulse of his soul,” which indicates that an action or an attitude is fundamentally right or wrong, regardless of any discomfort or humiliation in which it might entail?

These comments are not meant to moralize but rather to suggest that it is a fruitful practice to measure one’s own standards and behavior against those of the Mahatmas as revealed in the letters, remembering always that what we are they have been, and what they are, we shall be. They have been

through the human struggle, and it was in dealing with the experiences of that phase of their evolution that they developed the great wisdom and compassion which enable them to stand where they now are.

Attaining the rewards of Adeptship (and there are rewards, as will be seen from a later quotation), does not imply a life of ease and freedom from responsibility. Rather, responsibilities are immeasurably increased and strict rules govern membership in the Brotherhood. Again and again in the letters there are references to the laws by which they live and work.

Ages ago our people began to make certain rules, according to which they intended to live. All these rules have now become law (ML 207/205; C-78).

Law is LAW with us, and no power can make us abate one jot or tittle of our duty (ML 226/223; C-93).

Duty, let me tell you, is for us stronger than friendship or even love; as without this abiding principle which is the indestructible cement that has held together for so many milleniums the scattered custodians of nature's grand secrets—our Brotherhood, nay, our doctrine itself—would have crumbled long ago into unrecognizable atoms (ML 351/345; C-422).

Considering the whole texture of the teachings found in the letters, the impression is gained that these rules and laws are not something arbitrarily imposed by those highest in authority but rather that they are somehow organically meshed into *what is*; they are in harmony with the structure and operation of Nature's laws.

You must know and remember one thing [says the Mahatma K.H.], we but follow and *servilely copy nature* in her works (ML 22/22; C-37).

Every Western Theosophist should learn and remember, especially those who would be our followers—that in our Brotherhood, all personalities sink into one idea abstract right and absolute practical justice for all (ML 401/395; C-412).

One rule which is apparently inflexible is that members of the Brotherhood do not impose their will upon others. After commenting on some spiritualistic phenomena, in which all manifestations are presumed to be caused by disembodied “spirits,” the Mahatma K.H. asserts:

Alone the adepts, i.e. the embodied spirits—are forbidden by our wise and intransgressible laws to completely subject to themselves another and a weaker will (ML 40/40; C-59).

This would most certainly be a genuine test of the true spirituality of any teacher; an attempt to dominate or to impose the teacher's will upon the disciple would be suspect.

Another fact that emerges is that the Adepts are very much individuals, not in any sense rubber stamps of each other, or all falling into one kind of mold. Rather, their individual characteristics seem to be highly developed. This is most easily discerned in comparing the manner and style of their letters. As Mr. Sinnett commented in his book *The Occult World* (pp. 158–59), the Mahatma K.H. had a “gently mellifluous style” and often “would write half a page . . . rather than run the risk of letting

a brief or careless phrase hurt anybody's feelings," while the Mahatma M. wrote a "rugged hand" and "did not beat about the bush at all."

Considering that they are individuals, it is not surprising to find that they occasionally differ among themselves. From the Mahatma K.H.:

We are not—as you know—always of the same way of thinking (ML 327/322; C-341).

And from the Mahatma M.:

We . . . never quarrel . . . Quarrels and even discussions we leave to those who, unable to take in a situation at a glance are thereby forced before making up their final decision to anything to analyse and weigh one by one, and over and over again every detail (ML 218/215-6; C-86).

And further from the Mahatma K.H.:

I will never interfere in his [the Mahatma M.'s] ways of training, however distasteful they may be to me personally (ML 237/234; C-228).

Know my friend that though in our world we may differ in methods, we can never be opposed in *principles of action* (ML 244/241; C-463).

But whatever the methods or procedures:

Nothing, my friend—even apparently absurd and reprehensible actions—is ever done by us without a purpose (ML 332/326-7; C-345).

Their broad, general purpose is clearly stated; and it would appear that specific actions inevitably stem from this:

. . . the purpose we have all at heart, namely the dissemination of TRUTH through Esoteric Doctrines, conveyed by whatever religious channel, and the effacement of crass materialism and blind prejudice and skepticism (ML 398/392; C-409).

In spite of the highly developed individuality of the Adepts, a number of passages emphasize their strictly non-personal attitudes toward their tasks and toward those with whom they work. This does not imply indifference but, rather, strength; they have ever in mind their ultimate goals and cannot permit themselves to be deflected by any personal considerations.

The first requisite in even a simple fakir, is that he should have trained himself to remain as indifferent to moral pain as to physical suffering. Nothing can give us *personal* pain or pleasure (ML 224/221; C91).

We never whine over the inevitable but try to make the best of the worst. And though we neither push nor draw into the mysterious domain of occult nature those who are unwilling; never shrink from expressing our opinions freely and fearlessly, yet we are ever ready to assist those who come to us (ML 16-17/16-17; C-19).

Realize my friend that the social affections have little, if any, control over any true adept in the performance of his duty (ML 259/255; C-112-13).

In our sight an honest boot-black is as good as an honest king, and an *immoral* sweeper far higher and more excusable than an *immoral* emperor (ML 223/220; C-90).

We have no right to indulge in *personal* attachments and feelings (ML 314/309; C-297).

We have no favorites, break no rules . . . let him rid himself of the *maya* that any man living can set up “claims” upon Adepts. He may create irresistible *attractions* and compel their attention, but they will be spiritual, not mental or intellectual . . . *nothing* draws us to any outsider save his evolving spirituality (ML 341/335-6; C-374-5).

Strong will creates and sympathy attracts even adepts, whose laws are antagonistic to their mixing with the uninitiated (ML 20/20; C-27).

I can come nearer to you, but you must draw me by a purified heart and a gradually developing will. Like the needle the adept follows his attractions (ML 266/262; C-130-31).

In spite of the rather towering perspective from which so many of these statements seem to be made, there are passages which show the warm humanness of the Mahatmas, as well as the compassion which must be the deepest motivation for the tremendous sacrifice they have made in renouncing their own liberation to remain with suffering humankind. Mr. Hume, whose great stumbling block was his enormous pride, considered that he had reached a very superior stage of development. To him, the Mahatma K.H. said:

You pride yourself upon *not* being a “patriot”—*I do not*; for, in learning to love one’s country one but learns to love humanity more (ML 212/210; C33).

Some further human responses:

Until final emancipation reabsorbs the *Ego*, it *must* be conscious of the purest sympathies called out by the esthetic effect of high art, its tenderest cords

respond to the call of the holier and nobler *human attachments* (ML 32/32; C-48).

I confess that I, individually, am not yet exempt from some of the terrestrial attachments. I am still attracted to some men more than others, and philanthropy as preached by our Great Patron . . . “the Teacher of Nirvana and the Law” [the Buddha] has never killed in me either individual preferences of friendship, love—for my next of kin, or the ardent feeling of patriotism for the country in which I was last materially individualized (ML 33/33; C49).

Another aspect which shows the humanness of the Mahatmas is that when they are not functioning as Adepts, they are (they say) as likely as anyone else to make mistakes. The Mahatma K.H. explains it:

No adept can be supposed to keep his will in constant tension and the *inner* man in full function when there is no immediate necessity for it. When the *inner* man rests, the adept becomes an ordinary man, limited to his physical senses and the functions of his physical brain . . . The inner adept is ever ready, ever on the alert, and that suffices for our purposes. At moments of rest, then, his faculties are at rest also (ML 180/177; C-257).

He explains that this may account for some of his errors in punctuation, wrong use of idioms, etc.

An adept—the highest as the lowest—is one *only during the exercise of his occult powers* (ML 180/177; C-257).

Even an “adept” when acting in his body is not beyond mistakes due to human carelessness (ML 324/319; C-433).¹

We are not gods, and even they, our chiefs—they *hope* (ML 210/208; C-31).

As mentioned in the lesson on the first letter (chapter 3), the power of the Adepts, while tremendous, is not unlimited and they do not squander it uselessly. As in the goat story mentioned in the previous end-note, the Mahatma K.H. was aware that he had no right to use his power to nullify the effects of his carelessness. At another time, when Mr. Sinnett desired a repetition of an experience which he felt was particularly significant, the Mahatma K.H. told him that “it would be a waste of our strength” (ML 17/17; C-19). In still another situation, when Mr. Sinnett was undergoing some difficult times, the Mahatma M. assured

him: “We cannot alter Karma, my ‘good friend’ or we might lift the present cloud from your path” (ML 433/426: C-453).

As for the rewards of Adeptship mentioned earlier in this lesson, the Mahatma K.H. states the matter clearly:

Believe me, there comes a time in the life of an adept, when the hardships he has passed through are a thousandfold rewarded. In order to acquire further knowledge he has no more to go through a minute and slow process of investigation and comparison of various objects, but is accorded an instantaneous, implicit insight into every first truth . . . the adept sees and feels and lives in the very source of all fundamental truths (ML 241/238; C-55).

QUESTIONS

1. Describe in your own words your concept of an Adept.
2. State in what ways your previous ideas about Adeptship have been either confirmed or altered by the statements quoted in this lesson.
3. In what ways do the attitudes and standards of Adepts differ from those of the ordinary individual?
4. What is your understanding of the “attraction” which an aspirant may exert on an Adept?

Group study could include assigning some members to look up statements about Adeptship in *The Secret Doctrine*, the writings of Annie Besant, C. W. Leadbeater, C. Jinarajadasa, or Clara Codd. Compare these with the statements made in the letters.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Besant, *The Masters*.

Hodson, *The Call to the Heights*, chs. 6 “The Master’s Influence” and 7 “True and False Teachers.”

Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, chs. 6 “Kama Loka” and 9 “Buddha.”

CHAPTER 7

A Controversial Letter

Part One

Probably one of the most controversial items in Theosophical literature is Letter 10 in *The Mahatma Letters* (chron. 88). It was not one of the early letters; the correspondence had been going on for two years when it was received. Strictly speaking, it is not a letter at all. It is titled, “Notes by K.H. on a ‘Preliminary Chapter’ headed ‘God’ by Hume, intended to preface an exposition of Occult Philosophy.”

Hume had drafted a chapter on the subject of “God” for a book he was writing and had sent this draft to the Mahatma K.H. for review and correction. This was a practice frequently followed by both Englishmen in their writings on Theosophical subjects. The original of these “Notes” addressed to Mr. Hume is not available, but a copy in Mr. Sinnett’s handwriting is included with the original letters in the British Museum. The fact that only this copy now exists has been cited by some as a basis for questioning its authenticity, but in another letter the Master refers to it specifically.¹ This seems sufficient verification. In any event, since the letter was addressed to Mr. Hume, it would be unlikely that the

original would be among the letters preserved by Sinnett.

This letter has troubled many students and, in fact, has even turned some away from further study of the letters. This is unfortunate for it is a valuable letter and wholly compatible with present-day philosophical and scientific thought.

The controversial nature of Letter 10 (chron. 88) rests on two assertions in it: “we deny God” and “we believe in MATTER alone.”

These two statements have called forth such epithets as *agnostics*, *atheists*, and *materialists*—all seemingly justified from the traditional point of view. But further study reveals the inaccuracy of such labels.

In fact, the Mahatma specifically denies the charge of *agnosticism*—the doctrine that the mind cannot know ultimate reality. “We deny most emphatically the position of agnosticism,” the Mahatma says in this letter. “Our doctrine knows no compromises. It either affirms or denies, for it never teaches but that which it knows to be the truth. Pantheistic² we may be called—agnostic, NEVER” (ML 53/53; C-270).

It may be useful here to repeat a comment made by the Mahatma K.H. at

another time in a different context and quoted earlier in Chapter 6 of this guide.

... the purpose we have all at heart, namely the dissemination of TRUTH through Esoteric Doctrines, conveyed by whatever religious channel, and the effacement of crass materialism and blind prejudice and skepticism (ML 398/392; C-409).

As one studies the letters, one cannot help noticing that the Mahatma never denies the reality of spirit—only of spirit as a separate and distinct principle apart from matter.

“It is one of the elementary and fundamental doctrines of Occultism,” he writes elsewhere in the letters, “that the two [spirit and matter] are one, and are distinct but in their respective manifestations, and only in the limited perceptions of the world of senses” (ML 141/138; C-282). “Spirit is called the ultimate sublimation of matter, and matter the crystallization of spirit . . . matter *per se*, is indestructible and . . . co-eval with spirit” (ML 142/138; C-283).

Again, he says, “Bereaved of Prakriti [matter], Purusha [Spirit] is unable to manifest itself, hence ceases to exist . . . Motion is eternal because spirit is eternal. But no modes of motion can ever be conceived unless they be in connection with matter” (ML 142/139; C-283). “It is *motion* with its resulting conflict, neutralization, equilibration, correlation, to which is due the infinite variety which prevails” (ML 140/137; C-281). The Mahatma also quotes the eighteenth-century German philosopher Georg Bilfinger: “‘Motion is a manner of existence that flows necessarily out of the essence of matter’” (ML 56/56; C-273).

If one interprets correctly the statements of a modern physicist, Dr. Fritjof Capra, this view is becoming increasingly prevalent as a result of today’s scientific research.

The cosmos is seen as one inseparable reality—forever in motion, alive, organic; spiritual and material at the same time . . . the forces causing the motion are not outside the objects, as in the classical Greek view, but are an intrinsic property of matter. Correspondingly, the Eastern image of the Divine is not that of a ruler who directs the world from above, but of a principle which controls everything from within . . . The modern physicist, like the Eastern mystic, has come to see the world as a system of inseparable, interacting, and ever-moving components, with the observer being an integral part of this system (*The Tao of Physics*).³

Dr. Capra mentions the unending paradoxes that confronted atomic researchers and points out that the classical concepts of Newtonian physics had to be abandoned. “Particles are then seen as dynamic patterns or processes,” he says, “which involve a certain amount of energy appearing to us as their mass.”⁴ “The whole universe appears as a dynamic pattern of inseparable energy patterns.”⁵

If the student is familiar with *The Secret Doctrine* concept of “the Web of the Universe” this will have special meaning. The earth is not simply a cosmic lump of dead matter but a great, pulsating, living being. Dr. Capra’s statements sound very much like a modern echo of the Mahatma’s words.

Students of Theosophy are familiar with the concept of different grades of matter. But how many have thought of matter

as a manifestation of life—as life itself, in fact? Generally the opposite has been the case, for so-called “dead matter” has long been an accepted concept. It has never been wholly abandoned, in spite of its total incompatibility with the Einsteinian formula $E = MC^2$.⁶ This tells us, in layman terms, that matter and energy are one.

In Letter 10 (chron. 88) the Mahatma says, “When we speak of our One Life, we say also that it penetrates, nay is the essence of every atom of matter; and that therefore it not only has correspondence with matter but has all its properties likewise, etc.—hence *is* material, *is matter itself*.”

The anthropologist/philosopher Dr. Loren Eiseley comments in his book *The Immense Journey* that “if ‘dead’ matter has reared up this curious landscape of fiddling crickets, song sparrows, and wandering men, it must be plain even to the most devoted materialist that the matter of which he speaks contains amazing, if not dreadful powers, and may not impossibly be . . . but one mask worn by the Great Face behind.”⁷

In an article in *The American Theosophist*, May 1979, Dr. Capra says that subatomic particles are not “things” but interconnections between things, and these “things” are interconnections between other things, and so on and on. “In atomic physics,” he says, “you never end up with any ‘things’ at all; you always end up with interconnections.” Further, “The universal interconnectedness of nature always includes the human observer and his or her consciousness in an essential way . . . the electron does not have properties independent of my mind.”⁸

This gives us a view of interconnectedness in which there is no possible separation but only functional specializations which contribute in myriad ways to the universal dynamics. The Mahatma K.H. speaks of interconnectedness more poetically but just as cogently: “Nature has linked all parts of her Empire together by subtle threads of magnetic sympathy, and there is a mutual correlation between a star and a man” (ML 267/263; C-132).

In the above-mentioned article by Dr. Capra, he says: “Matter is never quiescent, but always in a state of motion.”⁹ The Mahatma K.H. says, in Letter 10 (chron. 88): “[No] atom is ever in an absolute state of rest” (ML 55/55; C-273).

Again, Dr. Capra: “Every particle consists of all other particles.” Could there be a clearer statement of the One Life mentioned by the Mahatma K.H. in Letter 10 as the only reality which might be called God?

Referring in another letter to the conclusion by an English member that the Mahatmas “have no God” the Mahatma K.H. says:

He is right—since he applies the name to an extracosmic anomaly, and we, knowing nothing of that, find each his *God* . . . within himself in his own personal and, at the same time, *impersonal* Avalokiteshwara (ML 393/387; C-390).¹⁰

If an oversimplification might be ventured, one might say that the God which the Mahatmas deny is the “extracosmic anomaly” which has for so long been the accepted concept, and the Matter which they affirm is the eternally operative device of the Divine Reality.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain how this commentary, which is not a letter, came to be included in the volume.
2. Why is this document so controversial?
3. How do the views of the Mahatma K.H. compare with some of the views of modern physics?
4. After considering the points made in this chapter, what is your evaluation of this “letter”? What did it evoke in you regarding thoughts, feelings, and conflicts?
5. Referring to Appendix C, what are the eternal things that exist even during pralaya or non-manifestation?

In group study, it is suggested that different members of the group might be assigned to explore the supplementary reading recommended and report to the group for discussion. Specific page references for group participation:

Mahatma Letter 22 (chron. 90).

The Theosophist, October 1979, p. 24 ff.

Look up references to deity and God in the index of *The Secret Doctrine*.

The Tao of Physics by Fritjof Capra; Boulder: Shamballa, 1975, pp. 24-25.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Capra, *The Turning Point*.

Goswami, *The Self-Aware Universe*.

_____, *The Visionary Window*.

Greene, *The Fabric of the Universe*.

Laszlo, *Science and the Akashic Field*.

Talbot, *Mysticism and the New Physics*.

Wolf, *Taking the Quantum Leap*.

Zukav, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*.

CHAPTER 8

A Controversial Letter

Part Two

In Letter 10 (chron. 88), the Mahatma K.H. touches upon another subject: the perennial problem of good and evil, that mystery which has plagued philosophers and religionists throughout the ages.

“Evil has no existence *per se*,” writes the Mahatma, “and is but the absence of good and exists but for him who is made its victim . . . no more than good is it an independent cause in nature. Nature is destitute of goodness or malice; she follows only immutable laws, when she either gives life and joy or sends suffering [and] death, and destroys what she has created” (ML 56/56; C-273).

We cannot but be aware that, in the economy of nature, every creature preys upon some other creature. Why is this necessary? we may ask. But, says the Mahatma,

Nature has an antidote for every poison and her laws a reward for every suffering. The butterfly devoured by a bird becomes that bird, and the little bird killed by an animal goes into a higher form . . . It is the blind law of necessity and the eternal fitness of things, and hence cannot be called Evil in Nature (ML 56-7/56-7; C-273).

Here, it seems, the Mahatma K.H. is speaking of what may appear to us the cruelty and evil of creatures preying upon weaker creatures and upon less developed forms of life; we may think of the “evil” of great natural disasters which bring such suffering and tragedy to those who happen to be caught up in them. Sometimes we hear people say, “God shouldn’t permit such a thing!” It is not uncommon for someone to deny the existence of God as a result of this kind of suffering, either their own or that of some loved one. But the Mahatma has pointed out how the balance of Nature is maintained and how every seeming tragedy to the individual moves universal evolution along.

He goes on to point out, “The real evil proceeds from human intelligence and its origin rests entirely with reasoning man who dissociates himself from Nature. Humanity, then, alone is the true source of evil” (ML 57/57; C-273-4).

This seems a severe indictment, but a little thought will confirm its accuracy. Nature, the Mahatma has insisted, is not evil. The animal that kills for food is only obeying the blind law of necessity. Humans

may kill for sport or for the thrill of pitting their strength and skill against that of some other creature. If a person does not kill in the physical sense, they may engage in other kinds of cruelty—psychological cruelty, which may inflict more long lasting suffering than mere physical cruelty. With the intelligence attained in the human status, people are capable of the most devious and appalling cruelty to their fellow creatures. Paradoxically, compassion too, which tempers the instinct for individual survival, is a quality attained only at the human level. Nevertheless the statement that human intelligence is responsible for evil seems warranted.

After identifying humanity as the true source of evil, the Mahatma K.H. then makes another provocative statement: “Evil is the exaggeration of good” (ML 57/57; C-274).

This, too, is apparent if we give it a little thought. The Mahatma names a number of the “necessities” of life, or the normal and healthy activities in which humans may engage. But when these are carried to extremes—always through human greed or selfishness—they become the cause of suffering and misery. Enjoyment of food and drink—even ambition if it is the desire to secure happiness and comfort for loved ones—all are quite natural feelings, he says. But when taken to extremes, they become gluttony, debauchery, tyranny. Love of beauty may become twisted into vanity; thrift into miserliness; generosity into profligacy. Anything carried to extremes becomes its opposite. This is the law.

Therefore, says the Mahatma, “It is neither nature nor an imaginary Deity that has to be blamed, but human nature made vile by selfishness” (ML 57/57; C-274).

The Mahatma K.H. then makes a rather startling statement, after allowing for the so-called evils that are “natural” and cannot be avoided:

I will point out the greatest, the chief cause of nearly two-thirds of the evils that pursue humanity ever since that cause became a power. It is religion, under whatever form and in whatsoever nation. It is the sacerdotal caste, the priesthood and the churches; it is in those illusions that man looks upon as sacred that he has to search out the source of the multitude of evils which is the great curse of humanity and that almost overwhelms mankind. Ignorance created gods and cunning took advantage of the opportunity . . . It is priestly imposture that rendered these gods so terrible to man; it is religion that makes of him the selfish bigot, the fanatic that hates all mankind not of his own sect . . . Is not man ready to commit any kind of evil if told that his God or Gods demand the crime? (ML 57-8/57-8; C-274)

Alas, this is all too true—but, again, as we consider the statement of the Mahatma, we realize that it is still *man*, that is, the human being with intellect and cunning and appalling selfishness, who has created the evil. Religion has simply been the means that has been used to gain power or to furnish a rationale for an innate hatred of those who disagree with us.

“Remember,” adds the Mahatma, “the sum of human misery will never be diminished unto that day when the better portion

of humanity destroys in the name of Truth, morality, and universal charity, the altars of their false gods” (ML 58/58; C-275).

Today we like to think that we have risen above these cruel and bloodthirsty feelings toward those who do not agree with us in the matter of religion. But have we? Perhaps the manifestations of the evil are more subtle—yet the desire of those in power to force others to believe as they do is still among us. Our basic human freedoms are not yet secure.

So perhaps this evil really rests in that strange aberration of the human mind that wants everyone else to believe as it believes and will even go so far as to inflict suffering and death on those who do not, or who cannot, believe in the same manner. Or possibly it is a kind of basic insecurity that cannot bear to be without the bolstering of support for one’s own opinions.

This letter is one of the most “astringent” ones in the volume. Studying it takes some willingness to search one’s own attitudes toward the problem of good and evil. Perhaps more than any other letter, it raises the question, “What is truth?” Is truth a statement pronounced by some so-called authority? Is truth an experience? Or is it a process?

Toward the end of this letter, the Mahatma sets forth a brief version of the Buddhist doctrine called the “chain of dependent origination,” showing how suffering and evil arise and how they may be conquered. The Mahatma quotes from a Buddhist text, the Mahavagga: “From ignorance spring all the evils. From knowledge comes the cessation of this mass of misery” (ML 59/59; C-275).

QUESTIONS

1. What was your *first* reaction to the statements about good and evil in this lesson, and how does further reflection modify or reinforce that reaction?
2. Give some examples of how the exaggeration of good becomes an evil.
3. Considering the statement that the “real evil” does not proceed from Nature but from humanity, what factor or factors do you think become operative when the human status is achieved that are not present in the so-called lower kingdoms?
4. In your opinion, why is religion such a crucial element in the nature of humankind?

For group study, see the list of references below. Members might also try to observe their own reactions to those who disagree with them, especially in the matter of religion. Some member might well do research into the “chain of dependent origination” and report to the group.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Abdill, *The Still Point Between Good and Evil*, DVD.

Barker, *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, Letter 134 (chron. 30). The student should keep in mind that this is a letter from H. B. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett and it incorporates material dictated by the Master to HPB intended for Sinnett. The comments in parentheses within the letter make more sense if you keep this in mind.

Besant, *Some Problems of Life*, ch. 1 “Problems of Ethics.”

_____, *The Spiritual Life*, ch. 11 “The Use of Evil.”

Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, ch. 8 “The Progress of Humanity.”

CHAPTER 9

Some Important Passages

The letters contain many gems which have not so far been touched upon in this study guide. These relate to a number of subjects, all pertinent to the ideas the Mahatmas were trying to impress upon the two Englishmen. Eventually, Mr. Hume became impatient because, in his view, the Mahatmas were too secretive about their teachings and because he felt they gave insufficient importance to his advice concerning the dissemination of those teachings. He found another guru and eventually left the Theosophical Society. Mr. Sinnett remained faithful to the Mahatmas to the end of his life, although the letters ceased in 1885.¹ He confidently felt he was in touch with the Mahatma K.H. through other means and while this belief is largely received with skepticism by Theosophical students, no one can be in a position to *know* positively whether it was justified.

It is, however, the letters themselves with which this guide is concerned and, as the student will surely have discovered, many deep philosophical truths fairly leap out at the reader from the pages of the book.

The truths and mysteries of occultism [says the Mahatma K.H.] constitute, indeed, a body of the highest spiritual im-

portance, at once profound and practical for the world at large. Yet it is not as a mere addition to the tangled mass of theory or speculation in the world of science that they are being given to you, but for their practical bearing on the interests of mankind (ML 23/23; C-38).

At another time he commented:

To show you how exact a science is occultism let me tell you that the means we avail ourselves of are laid down for us in a code as old as humanity to the minutest detail, and everyone of us had to begin from the beginning, not from the end (ML 144/140; C-285).

He added that he himself had to study for fifteen years before he came to the doctrine of cycles and “had to learn simpler things at first” (ML 144/141; C-285). This is a surprising statement, in view of the fact that today anyone who cares to do so may study the subject of cycles in many Theosophical books, particularly in *The Secret Doctrine*. It does indicate, however, the Mahatma’s thorough grounding in the occult principles, and it is probable that the study to which he referred was immeasurably more complex than that which is available to the casual reader.

The cyclic principle is observable in every aspect of life; we are so accustomed to it that we may not even wonder about it or ask what causes its manifestations. At one time, the Mahatma M., writing of cyclic processes “repeated endlessly throughout Eternity,” commented:

This picture of an eternity of action may appall the mind that has been accustomed to look forward to an existence of ceaseless repose. But their concept is not supported by the analogies of nature . . . We know that periods of action and rest follow each other in everything in nature from the macrocosm with its Solar System down to man and [his] parent-earth, which has its seasons of activity followed by those of sleep; and that in short, all nature, like her begotten living forms, has her time for recuperation. So with the spiritual individuality . . . (ML 68/68; C-127).

It is tempting to speculate whether the study to which the Mahatma K.H. referred had to do with the cycles of the “spiritual individuality” mentioned by the Mahatma M., information on which is not available anywhere in exoteric literature.

When Mr. Sinnett was gathering material for his book *Esoteric Buddhism*, he questioned the Mahatma K.H. concerning the number of incarnations an individual might experience, and the Mahatma replied:

Not being permitted to give you the whole truth or to divulge the numbers of isolated fractions, I am unable to satisfy you by giving you the total number. Rest assured, my dear Brother, that to one who does not seek to become a practical occultist, these numbers are immaterial. Even our high chelas are refused these particulars to the moment of their initiation into adeptship. These figures . . . are so interwoven with

the profoundest psychological mysteries that to divulge the key to [them] would be to put the rod of power within the reach of all the clever men who would read your book (ML 81/81; C-174).

A provocative statement is made a little later to the effect that all is septenary, and the Mahatma adds:

The degrees of an Adept’s initiation mark the seven stages at which he discovers the secret of the sevenfold principles in nature and man and awakens his dormant powers (ML 99/97; C-189).

One of the many hints which emerge from the letters is that an aspirant should not be heedless or hasty in pursuit of the occult life. The Mahatma K.H. warns:

If you value the word *of honor* of one who never—*never* during his whole life polluted his lips with an untruth, then do not forget the words I once wrote to you . . . *of those who engage themselves in the occult sciences*; he who does it “must either reach the goal or perish.” Once fairly started on the way to the great Knowledge, to doubt is to risk insanity; to come to a dead stop is to fall; to recede is to tumble backward, headlong, into an abyss. Fear not—if you are sincere (ML 31/31; C-48).

An observation which may apply to many eager students:

All quick thinkers are hard to impress—in a flash they are out and away in “full cry,” before half understanding what one wants to have them think. This is our trouble with both [Mme. Blavatsky and Olcott]. The frequent failure of the latter to carry out the suggestions he sometimes receives, even when written, is almost wholly due to his own active mentality, preventing his distinguishing our impressions from his own conceptions (ML 36/36; C-52).

While in England in 1881, Mr. Sinnett and an Englishman by the name of Stainton Moses (teacher of classics and English at University College, London), with Mrs. Anna B. Kingsford (who later became president of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society for a time), conceived a rather grandiose idea for the promotion of the occult philosophy and for demonstrating it to the world. However, when Mr. Sinnett returned to India, the Mahatma K.H. asked him to defer these plans and added:

It is because we are playing a risky game and the stakes are human souls that I ask you to possess yours in patience (ML 39/39; C-58).

An intriguing passage is found in connection with some of the difficulties of the neophyte in understanding and performing to the best advantage. The Mahatma K.H. mentions the physical, moral, and intellectual idiosyncrasies of different individuals, and says:

If we add to this the countless kosmical influences which distort and deflect all efforts to achieve definite purposes. . . I think we shall have no difficulty in understanding how even a definite spiritual advance may lead different individuals to different conclusions and theories (ML 49/49; C-67).

And here is a magnificent statement concerning the work which the Brotherhood has carried on for centuries:

We have offered to exhume the primeval strata of man's being, his basic nature, and lay bare the wonderful complications of his inner Self—and demonstrate it scientifically. It matters not to them if the excavations be so deep, the rocks so rough

and sharp, that in diving into that, to them, fathomless ocean, most of us perish in the dangerous explorations; for it is we who were the divers and the pioneers, and the men of science have but to reap where we have sown. It is our mission to plunge and bring the pearls of truth to the surface; theirs—to clean and set them into scientific jewels (ML 51/51; C-68).

For countless generations hath the adept builded a fane of imperishable rocks, a giant's tower of INFINITE THOUGHT, wherein the Titan dwelt, and will yet, if need be, dwell alone, emerging from it but at the end of every cycle to invite the elect of mankind to co-operate with him and help in his turn enlighten superstitious man. And we will go on in that periodical work of ours; we will not allow ourselves to be baffled in our philanthropic attempts until that day when the foundations of a new continent of thought are so firmly built that no amount of opposition and ignorant malice . . . will be found to prevail (Ibid).

A bit of advice to Mr. Sinnett, but no doubt applicable to all:

For a clearer comprehension of the extremely abstruse and at first incomprehensible theories of our occult doctrine, never allow the serenity of your mind to be disturbed during your hours of literary labour, nor before you set to work. It is upon the serene and placid surface of the unruffled mind that the visions gathered from the invisible find a representation in the visible worlds . . . It is with jealous care that we have to guard our mind-plane from the adverse influences which daily arise in our passage through earth-life (ML 64/64; C-169).

One or two citations on the subject of Devachan may be of interest here. In

answering some of the many questions asked by the two Englishmen, the Mahatma K.H. states:

There are great varieties in the Devachan states . . . It is an ideated paradise, in each case of the Ego's own making, and by him filled with the scenery, crowded with the incidents, and thronged with the people he would expect to find in such a sphere of compensative bliss . . . it is such degrees of spirituality that constitute and determine the great "varieties" of conditions within the limits of Devachan (ML 102/100; C-192).

It would seem that Devachan is adjusted to the previous conditions of the life led by the individual and to the modes of that person's thought—the highest and happiest possible—so that everyone has his or her time in Devachan.

All the great plans of moral reform, of intellectual and spiritual research into abstract principles of nature, all the divine aspirations, would, in Devachan come to fruition (ML 191/189; C-355).

All the aspirations, desires, hopes, dreams, which . . . had ever crossed the *dreamer's* brain during his lifetime, without having ever found their realization on earth . . . he now finds fully realized in all their vividness in Devachan . . . [they are] the effects of the mental causes produced by himself (Ibid).

Mr. Sinnett had expressed the idea that Devachan could get very boring if it meant a life of continual bliss, without any change. The Mahatma disabused him of that false notion:

Certainly there is . . . a continual change in Devachan, just as much—and far more—than there is in the life of any man or woman who happens to follow in his or

her *whole life* one sole occupation, whatever it may be; with that difference, that to the *Devachanee* his special occupation is always pleasant and fills *his* life with rapture (ML 197/194; C-359-60).

In the second Devachan Letter, the Mahatma K.H. comments:

Love and *Hatred* are the only *immortal* feelings . . . Imagine yourself in Devachan with those you may have loved with such immortal love . . . that unalloyed felicity which, in proportion to the intensity of the feelings that *created* it, may last from a few to several thousand years (ML 127/124; C-209).

Many other passages from the Devachan Letters offer fascinating prospects for exploration. In answer to a question of Mr. Sinnett's concerning his investigations into "the operations of Nature" the Mahatma K.H. said:

Life, after all—the greatest problem within the ken of human conception—is a mystery that the greatest of your men of science will never solve. In order to be correctly comprehended, it has to be studied in the entire series of its manifestations, otherwise it can never be, not only fathomed, but even comprehended in its easiest form—life, as a state of *being* on this earth. It can never be grasped so long as it is studied separately and apart from universal life . . . Let them try and examine or analyze life apart from organism, and what remains of it? Simply a mode of motion; which, unless our doctrine of the all-pervading, infinite, omnipresent Life is accepted—though it be accepted on no better terms than a hypothesis . . . has to remain unsolved . . . since motion is all-pervading and absolute rest inconceivable . . . under whatever form or *mask* motion may appear, whether as light, heat,

magnetism, chemical affinity or electricity—all these must be but phases of One and the same universal omnipotent Force . . . the “Great Unknown”—and we simply call [it] the “One Life,” the “One Law,” and the “One Element (ML 158-9/155-6; C-316).

The Mahatma continues, in answer to a question about magnetism:

All the phenomena of earth currents, terrestrial magnetism and atmospheric electricity are due to the fact that the earth is an electrified conductor, whose potential is ever changing, owing to its rotation and its annual orbital motion, the successive cooling and heating of the air, the formation of clouds and rain, storms and winds, etc. . . . [and] that these changes are really due to *akasic* magnetism incessantly generating electric currents which tend to restore the disturbed equilibrium (ML 160/156-7; C-317).

Concerning a charge made by Mr. Hume that the Mahatmas selfishly kept to themselves the truths he was so eager to have revealed, the Mahatma K.H. commented:

You will find that it was never the intention of the Occultists really to conceal what they had been writing from the earnest determined students, but rather to lock up their information for safety-sake in a secure safe-box, the key to which is—intuition. The degree of diligence and zeal with which the hidden meaning is sought by the student is generally the test—how far he is entitled to the possession of the so buried treasure (ML 279/275; C-141).

The quality of wisdom ever was, and will be yet for a long time . . . denied to him who seeks the wealth of the mind for its own sake (ML 305/300; C-290).

The above citations by no means exhaust the rich mine of thought-provoking comments. They are samplings only; the student, with “diligence and zeal,” will find many others which stimulate the imagination, evoke the intuition, and lead increasingly to the exciting rewards of true exploration.

One further subject, however, should not be omitted. The Mahatmas never lost interest in the Theosophical Society (of which they have always been considered by many to be the Inner Founders) in spite of the many failures and errors of individuals, which are inherent in any human enterprise.

Theosophy is no new candidate for the world’s attention, but only the restatement of principles which have been recognized from the very infancy of mankind . . . the present tidal wave of phenomena, with its varied effects upon human thought and feeling, made the revival of Theosophical inquiry an indispensable necessity . . . You have done well to see the “large purpose” in the small beginnings of the T.S. Of course, if we had undertaken to found and direct it in *propria persona*, very likely it would have accomplished more and made fewer mistakes, but we could not do this, nor was it the plan; our two agents [HPB and Colonel Olcott] are given the task and left—as *you now are*—to do the best they could under the circumstances (ML 34-5/34-5; C-51).

The Society will never perish, although branches and individuals in it may (ML 245/242; C-269).

The sun of Theosophy must shine for all, not for a part. There is more to this movement than you have yet had an inkling of, and the work of the T.S. is linked in with similar work that is secretly going on in all parts of the world (ML 271/267; C-133).

Those who have watched mankind through the centuries of this cycle, have constantly seen the details of this death-struggle between Truth and Error repeating themselves . . . But if you remain true to and stand faithfully by the T.S. you may count upon our aid and so may all others to the full extent that they shall deserve it . . . If you would go on with your occult studies and literary work—then learn to be loyal to the ideal, rather than to my poor self (ML 322-3/317-9; C-431-2).

And one last quotation:

It is only when all outward appearances are gone that there is left that one principle of life which exists independently of all external phenomena. It is the fire that burns in the eternal light, when the fuel is expended and the flame is extinguished; for that fire is neither in the flame nor in the fuel . . . but above, beneath, and everywhere (ML 455/448; C-217).

QUESTIONS

1. What, *in your view*, is the value to the world of the teachings given by the Mahatmas? What problems might they create for the individual?
2. Give some examples from your own observations of the operation of the law of cycles and its influence on living beings.
3. How might the principle of reincarnation operate in other ways than the physical?
4. Why, in your opinion, is it dangerous to turn back once one has set their feet on the Path?
5. State your view of the meaning of the Mahatma's words, "the all-pervading, infinite, omnipresent life."

In group study, a worthwhile discussion might be developed on the subject of the selfless work done by the Brotherhood through the ages. Another subject offering real opportunity for thought and insight is the Mahatma's statement that "love and hatred are the only immortal feelings."

Another interesting approach to a group discussion might be to take the passage previously cited in this chapter ("We have offered to exhume the primeval strata . . . etc." ML 51/51; C-68) and discuss the referent to the word "them" in the second sentence. Some people think it refers to the Brotherhood when it says, "It matters not to them." Others think it refers to the scientists who know nothing about the work the Adepts do in this regard. Also, who does the word "theirs" refer to in the last sentence: "theirs—to clean and set them into scientific jewels." Does this word have the same referent as the previous "them"?

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Besant, *Initiation*.

Hanson, *An Introduction to the Study of the Mahatma Letters*, Pts. 1-5, audio CD.

Hodson, *The Call to the Heights*, chs. 26 "Present-Day Initiations" and 28 "The Great Initiations."

Preston, *Earth and Its Cycles*.

_____, *Life and Its Spirals*.

Conclusion

Perhaps one fact that will strike both the individual student and any group that may use this study guide will be its relative brevity compared to the length of the book itself. In that sense, it is hoped that it will leave the student(s) dissatisfied and eager to discover the further riches that are to be mined with a little additional effort and perseverance. Should this be the case, it is recommended that the letters be studied chronologically. This will render many references more intelligible and will unfold the story in such a way that the absence of one side of the correspondence will be less of a handicap.

It should be stressed that the teachings that emerge from the letters are timeless and universal. While they were given in response to specific questions asked by two individuals in a previous century, they are without limitation in their applicability to our lives. Accordingly, every individual should take them in their full significance and meaning, as though addressed to him or her personally.

A further aspect might be mentioned. Occult teachings often involve paradox and are almost invariably accompanied

by what might almost be called an invitation to disbelieve in them. While nothing should be accepted on blind faith, neither should anything be rejected through blind prejudice. Each individual who studies the letters must discover their truth for himself, and this discovery can be made only through a courageous open-mindedness and a realistic willingness to “carve new tracks” in one’s thinking.

The two Englishmen with whom the Mahatmas corresponded sometimes accused the latter of contradicting themselves, of being inconsistent. The Mahatmas asked them to submit a list of such contradictions. The Englishmen were somewhat slow in doing this, for it turned out not to be as clear-cut a matter as they, with their Western logic, had at first supposed. It developed that the examples given by them were due to incompleteness rather than to inconsistencies (see ML, pp. 185–86/ 182–83; C-261-2). If there is a tendency, in studying the letters, to make this judgment, it might be well to remember that it is impossible to say everything about anything in one explanation—or perhaps ever.

A final quotation from the Mahatma K.H. to Mr. Sinnett may be appropriate as a conclusion to this guide:

I have laboured for more than a quarter of a century night and day to keep my place within the ranks of that invisible but ever busy army which labours and prepares for a task which can bring no reward but the consciousness that we are doing our duty to humanity; and, meeting you on my way

I have tried to—do not fear—not to enroll you, for that would be impossible, but to simply draw your attention, excite your curiosity, if not your better feelings, to the one and only truth. You proved faithful and true and have done your best. If your efforts will teach the world but one single letter from the alphabet of Truth—that Truth which once pervaded the whole world—your reward will not miss you (ML 242/238-39; C-55).

Appendix A

Chronology—*The Mahatma Letters*

Many dates are approximate or estimated. In most instances the date given is the date of receipt of the letter. Occasionally an incorrect date of receipt has been noted on the letter; in such instances the date has been determined by the context.

Chr. <u>No.</u>	ML <u>No.</u>	Page <u>2nd ed.</u>	Page <u>3rd ed.</u>	Date —
1	1	1	1	Oct. 17, 1880
2	2	6	6	Oct. 19
3A	3A	10	10	Oct. 20
3B	3B	10	10	Oct. 20
3C	3C	11	11	Oct. 20
4	143	488	481	Oct. 27
5	4	11	11	Nov. 3
6	126	454	447	Nov. 3
(This is a postscript to ML-4)				
7	106	443	436	Nov.
8	99	435	428	Nov. 20
9	98	434	427	Nov.
10	5	17	17	Nov. 26
11	28	207	205	Fall
12	6	22	22	Dec. 10
13	7	25	25	Jan. 30, 1881
14A	142A	486	479	Feb.
14B	142B	488	481	Feb.
15	8	26	26	Feb. 20
16	107	444	436	Mar. 1
17	31	240	237	Mar. 26
18	9	38	38	July 5
19	121	452	445	July 11

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Chr. <u>No.</u>	ML <u>No.</u>	Page <u>2nd ed.</u>	Page <u>3rd ed.</u>	Date _____
20	49	280	276	Aug. 5, 1881
21	27	204	202	Fall
22	26	203	201	Fall
23	104	440	433	Oct.
24	71	374	367	Fall
25	73	375	368	Oct.
26	102	439	432	Oct.
27	101	439	431	Oct.
28	74	375	369	Oct.
29	29	217	215	Oct.
30	134	461	454	Nov. 4
31	40	254	251	Nov.
32	114	449	442	Nov.
33	38	250	247	Nov.
34	39	253	249	Dec.
35	41	256	252	Dec.
36	36	248	244	Jan. 1882
37	37	248	245	Jan.
38	90	412	406	Jan.
39	115	449	442	Jan.
40	108	444	437	Jan.
41	109	444	437	Jan.
42	43	258	255	Jan.
43	42	257	253	Jan.
44	13	70	70	Jan.
45	44	263	259	Feb.
46	12	66	66	Feb.
47	45	264	260	Feb.
48	47	271	267	Mar. 3
49	48	273	269	Mar. 3
50	88	410	404	Mar. 11
51	120	452	444	Mar.
52	144	488	481	Mar. 14
53	136	464	457	Mar.
54	35	246	242	Mar. 18
55	89	410	404	Mar. 24
56	100	438	431	Mar.
57	122	452	445	Apr.
58	130	457	450	May
59	132	459	452	June
60	76	376	369	June
61	17	117	113	June
62	18	119	115	June
63	95	429	423	June

<u>Chr.</u> <u>No.</u>	<u>ML</u> <u>No.</u>	<u>Page</u> <u>2nd ed.</u>	<u>Page</u> <u>3rd ed.</u>	<u>Date</u> _____
64	131	458	451	June 26, 1882
65	11	59	59	June 30
66	14	78	77	July 9
67	15	88	87	July 10
68	16	99	97	July
69	69	373	366	July
70A	20A	123	120	July
70B	20B	125	121	July
70C	20C	127	123	July
71	19	122	119	Aug. 12
72	127	455	447	Aug. 13
73	113	448	441	Aug.
74	30	228	225	Aug.
75	53	294	290	Aug.
76	21	134	131	Aug. 22
77	50	286	282	Aug. 22
78	51	287	283	Aug.
79	116	450	443	Aug.
80	118	450	443	Fall
81	52	288	284	Fall
82	32	242	239	Fall
83	125	453	446	Fall
84	111	446	439	Sept.
85A	24A	178	175	Sept.
85B	24B	180	177	Sept.
86	112	447	440	Sept.
87	34	245	242	Fall
88	10	52	52	Fall
89	46	268	264	Fall
90	22	137	133	Oct.
91	110	445	437	Oct.
92	54	302	298	Oct.
93A	23A	144	141	Oct.
93B	23B	149	145	Oct.
94	117	450	443	Oct.
95	72	374	368	Nov.
96	92	419	413	Nov.
97	70	373	367	Dec. 7
98	105	441	434	Dec.
99	78	378	372	Dec.
100	79	382	376	Dec.
101	57	327	322	Jan. 6, 1883
102	56	325	320	Jan.
103A	91A	415	409	Jan.

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<u>Chr.</u> <u>No.</u>	<u>ML</u> <u>No.</u>	<u>Page</u> <u>2nd ed.</u>	<u>Page</u> <u>3rd ed.</u>	<u>Date</u> _____
103B	91B	416	409	Jan. 1883
104	25	191	188	Feb. 2
105	80	383	377	Feb.
106	103	440	432	Feb.
107	77	377	371	Mar.
108	58	336	331	Mar.
109	119	451	444	Mar.
110	67	371	364	Mar.
111	59	338	333	July
112	81	383	377	July
113	82	387	381	Aug.
114	83	393	387	Sept.
115	128	456	449	Nov.
116	129	456	449	Nov.
117	93	420	413	Dec.
118	96	431	424	Dec.
119	86	403	376	Jan. 1884
120	85	398	391	Jan.
121	84	397	391	Jan.
122	87	406	399	Jan.
123	68	372	366	Feb.
124	94	429	422	Feb.
125	61	349	344	Apr.
126	62	351	345	July
127	133	460	453	July
128	63	356	350	Summer
129	60	349	343	Sept.
130	55	322	317	Oct.
131	66	366	360	Oct.
132	135	464	457	Oct.
133	137	467	459	Nov.
134	64	358	352	Nov.
135	138	468	460	Mar. 1885
136	65	362	356	Mar. or April
137	97	433	426	Fall
138	145	488	481	Fall
139	140	478	470	Jan. 1886
140	141	482	474	Mar.
141	139	475	468	Mar.
Letters for which dates cannot be determined				
A	33	244	241	
B	75	375	369	
C	124	453	446	
D	123	453	446	

Appendix B

Cross Reference—*The Mahatma Letters*

ML No.	Chron. No.	Page <u>2nd ed.</u>	<u>3rd ed.</u>
1	1	1	1
2	2	6	6
3A	3A	10	10
3B	3B	10	10
3C	3C	11	11
4	5	11	11
5	10	17	17
6	12	22	22
7	13	25	25
8	15	26	26
9	18	38	38
10	88	52	52
11	65	59	59
12	46	66	66
13	44	70	70
14	66	78	77
15	67	88	87
16	68	99	97
17	61	117	113
18	62	119	115
19	71	122	119
20A	70A	123	120
20B	70B	125	121
20C	70C	127	123
21	76	134	131
22	90	137	133
23A	93A	144	141
23B	93B	149	145
24A	85A	178	175
24B	85B	180	177
25	104	191	188

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ML <u>No.</u>	Chron. <u>No.</u>	Page	
		<u>2nd ed.</u>	<u>3rd ed.</u>
26	22	203	201
27	21	204	202
28	11	207	205
29	29	217	215
30	74	228	225
31	17	240	237
32	82	242	239
33	A	244	241
34	87	245	242
35	54	246	242
36	30	248	244
37	37	248	245
38	33	250	247
39	34	253	249
40	31	254	251
41	35	256	252
42	43	257	253
43	42	258	255
44	45	263	259
45	47	264	260
46	89	268	264
47	48	271	267
48	49	273	269
49	20	280	276
50	77	286	282
51	78	287	283
52	81	288	284
53	75	294	290
54	92	302	298
55	130	322	317
56	102	325	320
57	101	327	322
58	108	336	331
59	111	338	333
60	129	349	343
61	125	349	344
62	126	351	345
63	128	356	350
64	134	358	352
65	136	362	356
66	131	366	360
67	110	371	364
68	123	372	366
69	69	373	366
70	97	373	367

ML <u>No.</u>	Chron. <u>No.</u>	<u>2nd ed.</u>	Page <u>3rd ed.</u>
71	24	374	367
72	95	374	368
73	25	375	368
74	28	375	369
75	B	375	369
76	60	376	369
77	107	377	371
78	99	378	372
79	100	382	376
80	104	383	377
81	112	383	377
82	113	387	381
83	114	393	387
84	121	397	391
85	120	398	391
86	119	403	396
87	122	406	399
88	50	410	404
89	55	410	404
90	38	412	406
91A	103A	415	409
91B	103B	416	409
92	96	419	413
93	117	420	413
94	124	429	422
95	63	429	423
9	118	431	424
97	137	433	426
98	9	434	427
99	8	435	428
100	56	438	431
101	27	439	431
102	26	432	439
103	106	440	432
104	23	440	433
105	98	441	434
106	7	443	436
107	16	444	436
108	40	444	437
109	41	444	437
110	91	445	437
111	84	446	439
112	86	447	440
113	73	448	441
114	33	449	442

THE MAHATMA LETTERS

<u>ML</u> <u>No.</u>	<u>Chron.</u> <u>No.</u>	<u>2nd ed.</u>	Page <u>3rd ed.</u>
115	39	449	442
116	79	450	443
117	94	450	443
118	80	450	443
119	109	451	444
120	51	452	444
121	19	452	445
122	57	452	445
123	C	453	446
124	D	453	446
125	83	453	446
126	6	454	447
127	72	455	447
128	115	456	449
129	116	456	449
130	58	457	450
131	64	458	451
132	59	459	452
133	127	460	453
134	31	461	454
135	132	464	457
136	53	464	457
137	133	467	459
138	135	468	460
139	141	475	468
140	139	478	470
141	140	482	474
142A	14A	486	479
142	14B	488	481
143	4	488	481
144	52	488	481
145	138	488	481

Appendix C

Cosmological Notes from A. P. Sinnett's MS. Book¹

Small type indicates *Questions* put by A.P.S. or A.O.H. to their Teachers, and large type—the *Answers received*.

(1) What are the different kinds of knowledge?

The real (Dgyu) and the unreal (Dgyu-mi). Dgyu becomes Fohat when in its activity—active agent of will—electricity—no other name.

(2) What is the difference between the two kinds of knowledge?

Real Knowledge deals with eternal verities and primal causes. The unreal only with illusory effects.

Dgyu stands independent of the belief or unbelief of man. Dgyu-mi requires faith—rests on authority.

(3) Who possesses the real knowledge?

The Lhas or adept alone possesses the real, his mind being *en rapport* with the Universal Mind.

The Lhas has made the perfect junction of his soul with the Universal Mind in its fullness, which makes him for the time a divine being existing in the region of absolute intelligence, knowledge of natural laws or Dgyu. The profane cannot become a Dang-ma (purified soul), for he lacks means of perceiving Chhag, Genesis or the beginning of things.

(4) Is there any difference between what produces primal causes and their ultimate effects?

None. Everything in the occult universe, which embraces all the primal causes, is based upon two principles—Kosmic energy (Fohat or breath of wisdom), and Kosmic ideation.

Thyan Kam (=the knowledge of bringing about) giving the impulse to Kosmic energy in the right direction.

In Fohat all that exists on earth as ultimates exists as primates.

1. *Partial reprint of Appendix II contained in The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*, edited by A. T. Barker, Theosophical University Press, Pasadena, 1973. In chronological edition, see Appendix III.

(5) What is the one eternal thing in the universe independent of every other thing?

Space.

(6) What things are co-existent with space?

(i) Duration

(ii) Matter

(iii) Motion, for this is the imperishable life (conscious or unconscious as the case may be) of matter, even during the pralaya, or night of mind.

When Chyang or omniscience, and Chyang-mi-shi-khon—ignorance, both sleep, this latent unconscious life still maintains the matter it animates in sleepless unceasing motion.

(iv) The Akasa (Bar-pang) or Kosmic atmosphere, or Astral light, or celestial ether, which whether in its latent or active condition, surrounds and interpenetrates all matter in motion of which it is at once a result and the medium by which the Kosmic energy acts on its source.

(v) The Purush or 7th principle of the universe.

Ling Sharir is composed of the ethereal elements of its (? body's) organism, never leaves body but at death and remains near.

(7) Are we to understand Purush as another name for space, or as a different thing occupying every part of space?

Same. Swayambu occupies every part of space which itself is boundless and eternal, hence must be space in one sense. Swayambu becomes Purush when coming in contact with matter.

Appendix D

Suggestions for Further Study

Several methods might be used in pursuing a study of the letters. If the student is interested in the historical background or the context of events, they should follow the chronological listing, beginning with the first letter, and include in their studies the books recommended for supplementary reading in the Introduction of this study guide. If the aim is to concentrate on the philosophical teachings, the student should simply disregard all references to events, persons, circumstances, etc. (which are frequently interspersed in letters dealing also with the philosophy) and be concerned only with the concepts; otherwise the distractions will be defeating and frustrating. To pursue this second method, the student may use the Index to compile a list of topics of particular interest, looking up all the references given and supplementing the statements in the letters with information given in other Theosophical texts.

The two methods can, of course, be pursued simultaneously, depending upon the depth of interest and the time available to the student. This can be a lifelong occupation, as the source material is practically inexhaustible.

With any method used, however, it would be advisable to have at hand a copy of the *Readers Guide to the Mahatma Letters*.

This book makes no attempt to expound the philosophy; it was compiled as an aid to the student in understanding some of the more obscure references and in gaining some idea of the content and aim of the correspondence between the Mahatmas and the Englishmen to whom the letters were directed.

The following list of letters suggested for additional study is compiled from the section of the second and third editions of the book entitled "Philosophical and Theoretical Teachings." Subjects such as probation, chelaship, adeptship, etc., have been discussed and cited in the various chapters of this guide, and references have been suggested. Volumes would be required for commentaries on the many other aspects of the letters which, in any event, would be of little interest unless the individual were pursuing the first method of study mentioned above. Only brief, clarifying statements on the letters listed below are included here. It would be interesting, however, and would greatly enliven the study of these subjects if the comments in the letters were compared with commentaries on the same subjects in *The Secret Doctrine* and other Theosophical texts. Comparison with present day concepts would also be extremely worthwhile. The letter numbers from the chronological

edition are indicated in parentheses and preceded by a “C.”

LETTER 6 (C-12)

This is one of the shorter letters but one that was destined to have repercussions. Much later, it precipitated what came to be called “The Kiddle Incident.” If a copy of the *Readers Guide to the Mahatma Letters* is available, the group should read Appendix E, which gives the story of the Kiddle incident. The group might also read the Mahatma’s explanation in ML 93 (chron. 117), beginning on p. 420/413; C-396 and ending on p. 429/422; C-404, but the pertinent part ends on p. 427/420–1; C-402 with the paragraph ending “European jury-men and judge.”

This letter is an important one as it pinpoints the Masters’ attitude toward Theosophical teachings and the Theosophical Society. The Master stresses the “practical bearing” of the philosophy on the good of humanity.

LETTER 8 (C-15)

This is a rather long letter, discussing several subjects, including the nature of occultism and the impact of the T.S. at that time. It contains a famous passage in which the Master K.H. refers to humanity as the “Great Orphan.” The problem of the direct communication with the Englishmen is also considered. The postscript might be omitted, as it has no bearing on the subject matter of the letter.

A few points which might be helpful:

Line 5, “Kalki Avatar” is the last avatar of the Mahayuga who appears at the end of the Kaliyuga to restore the purity of creation.

Lord Crawford and Balcarres: an English nobleman who was on the General Council of the T.S. but who had too many worldly duties to pursue the occult path.

On p. 33 (C-49), K.H. makes reference to “Precipitation—in your case having become unlawful . . .” At one time it was thought that this prohibition came about because of the Kiddle Incident, but this could not have been the case, since this letter was received in 1881 and the Kiddle Incident didn’t really blossom until 1883. Here, the Mahatma doesn’t say *why* he was prohibited from using precipitation at this time, but later on, in a postscript to ML-16 (chron. 68), he says: “But for the RULE that forbids our using one minim of power until every ordinary means has been tried and failed, I might, of course, have given you a lovely ‘precipitation’. . .” One might perhaps speculate that fairly early on in the correspondence it was felt by his superiors that he was dissipating power in the correspondence. He indicates a number of times in the Letters that he has to be careful about incurring the Mahachohan’s displeasure. In *The Occult World* (9th ed.), p. 156, Sinnett comments that the “higher authorities” had imposed “more stringent prohibition” than had been the case during the Simla phenomena; that they were not entirely pleased with the effect of those manifestations. Readers should keep this principle of “conservation” in mind when reading some of the “wild claims” occasionally made about what certain Higher Beings might do. They are not omnipotent as they make quite clear in their own statements.

An intriguing item: Note reference in the long paragraph on p. 34 (C-50) to the fact that Sinnett is “Not to use one single word or passage from my last letter to you . . . the one written after my long silence . . . I just quoted from it at page 4.” This quotation from the forbidden letter is found on p. 31 (C-48) beginning, “. . . must either reach the goal or *perish*.” This

is not found in any of the preceding letters or elsewhere in the book. Obviously there was one letter which never got into the published volume, one which Sinnett probably deliberately withheld. On p. 34 (C-50), where the Mahatma cautions Sinnett not to use anything from this last letter, he suggests: “. . . lay it by in a separate and sealed envelope.” Sinnett probably followed this instruction and never revealed to anyone what this letter contained. Also, see the reference to the “Forlorn hope” on p. 35 (C-51) of Letter 8 (chron. 15). This too must have been mentioned in the “forbidden” letter, for here he is obviously explaining it in answer to Sinnett’s question, and there is no previous mention of it in any letter. The only other mention of the “Forlorn hope” in the book is by the Mahatma M. a year later (see p. 263/260; C-125). (I might mention here that realization about this unpublished letter came some time after the *Readers Guide to The Mahatma Letters* was published and these various items fell together to make a picture of what happened.)

On p. 32 (C-49), K.H. speaks of humanity as the “Great Orphan.” The following quotation from an article by Loren Eiseley entitled “The Cosmic Orphan” published in the February 23, 1974 issue of *The Saturday Review*, may be of interest as a contemporary observation:

Once there was a poor orphan with no one to teach him either his way or his manners. Unlike other occupants of earth he had to be helped. He did not know his place; he had to find it. Sometimes he was arrogant and had to learn humility; sometimes he was a coward and had to be taught courage. Sometimes he did not understand his Mother Earth and suffered for it. The old ones . . . had known these things.

They were all gone now . . .

Long ago . . . in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls . . . an unknown scribe had written: “None there be, can rehearse the whole tale.” That phrase, too, contains the warning that man is an orphan of uncertain beginnings and an indefinite ending . . . Somewhere, seen dimly beyond, lies your destiny. God help you, you are a cosmic orphan. You are the only creature in the universe who knows what it has been . . . You have a secret magic that no other creature on the planet possesses: You use language . . . You are a time binder.

Let us then, as orphans who have come this long way through time, be willing to assume the risks of the uncompleted journey.

LETTER 9 (C-18)

This was the first letter to be received by A. P. Sinnett upon his return to India after a stay in England during which his first book, *The Occult World*, was published. It concerns a number of persons and events, which can be ignored, but it also contains the first, rather sketchy, statements on metaphysics and occultism.

LETTER 10 (C-88)

This letter was discussed in Chapters 7 and 8 of this study guide, but it deals with a few other subjects. In connection with the twelve Nidanas mentioned toward the end of the letter, consult the Glossaries, *The Secret Doctrine*, *The Divine Plan* by Geoffrey A. Barborka, and texts dealing with Buddhist philosophy.

LETTER 11 (C-65)

The original of this letter is not available. It was addressed to Mr. A. O. Hume, and

Sinnett copied it in his copybook, which is in the British Museum with the original letters. Numerous references are made to the science of that day. Modern physics is much more in accord with the statements made by the Mahatma.

LETTER 13 (C-44)

This letter has been mentioned previously in this guide. It is the first “Question and Answer” letter, giving both sides of the correspondence. It deals principally with cosmology (Cf. Genesis 2: 4-7).

LETTERS 14, 15 (C-66, 67)

More questions and answers. Copies in Mr. Sinnett’s copybook are the only ones available. The two letters are important especially from a technical point of view. Consult *The Secret Doctrine*, *The Divine Plan*, and other basic Theosophical literature.

LETTER 16 (C-68)

This is referred to as the “Devachan Letter.” It deals with a stage between death and rebirth. The Englishmen were dissatisfied with some of the answers and asked further questions, answers to which are found in:

LETTER 25 (C-104); SEE ALSO LETTERS 20A, 20B, AND 20C (C-70A, 70B, AND 70C)

In connection with these letters see *The Mahatmas and Their Letters* by Geoffrey A. Barborka, pp. 112–118. All these letters deal in the main with Devachan and related subjects.

LETTERS 17, 18, 95 (C-61, 62, 63)

These letters should be studied together. Letter 95 (C-63) is actually a part of Letter 18 (C-62), which was written on a different

kind of paper and became separated from the first part of the letter. This latter portion, however, is devoted to other subjects and is of less importance to the student of the philosophy. In the chronological edition, the two parts have been placed together as Letters 62 and 63.

LETTER 19 (C-71)

Contains a brief statement concerning the immediate state of the “good” and the “bad” after death.

LETTER 22 (C-90)

From the Mahatma K.H. to A. O. Hume. The subject matter of this letter is somewhat related to that of Letter 10 (C-88) and may have been in response to a letter from Hume commenting on some of the statements in that letter.

LETTERS 23A , 23B (C-93A, 93B)

Letter 23A (C-93A) consists of a series of questions by Mr. Sinnett. Some marginal notes and underscorings were made by the Mahatma directly on the letter. The first three questions under “I” are answered in this manner. Another series of questions begins under “II” and these are answered in 23B (C-93B). This is a very long letter, setting forth the teachings on a number of subjects.

LETTERS 24A, 24B (C-85A, 85B)

The two Englishmen (especially Mr. Hume) had accused the Mahatmas of contradicting themselves in some of their statements. The Mahatma K.H. asked Mr. Sinnett to compile a list of these contradictions and present it to him. Letter 24A (C-85A) lists them and is called “The Famous Contradictions.” Letter 24B (C85B) contains the Mahatma’s comments thereon.

Notes

Some abbreviations used below:

CW—*The H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*

HPB—Helena Petrovna Blavatsky

ML—*The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*

OW—*The Occult World*

TPH—*The Theosophical Publishing House*

CHAPTER ONE

1. Throughout this book the page in the second edition is given first. The page for the third edition follows the diagonal line. “C” indicates the page number in the chronological edition.
2. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, co-founder with Col. Henry Steel Olcott of the Theosophical Society. Usually designated simply HPB.
3. HPB was then 59 years of age; she was 60 when she died.
4. See CW, vol. 8, p. 400 for an account by Charles Johnston of his conversation with HPB.
5. See also *The Wisdom of the Vedas* by J. C. Chatterji, TPH, Wheaton, (A Quest Book), pp. 16–20.
6. “On the Watchtower,” *The Theosophist*, February 1956.

7. *Man, Son of Man*, by Sri Madhava Ashish, TPH, Adyar, 1970, pp. 317–18.
8. We learn from the letters that there are several such occult groups in different parts of the world (ML 399/393; C-410).
9. In one of the later letters, he indicated that the “Lal Singh” was added to his name “as half a *nom de plume*” by the high chela (disciple) Djual Khul. (ML 364/358; C-450).
10. Read the description of his writing in OW, p. 158, 9th ed.
11. *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, Second Series, edited by C. Jinarajadasa, TPH, Adyar. See the Foreword to letter 75.
12. It is understood that this was for the purpose of taking a higher initiation.

CHAPTER TWO

1. Three other volumes of letters from the Mahatmas are extant. *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, First and Second Series (referred to in Chapter 1), contains letters addressed to a number of individuals. They were edited by C. Jinarajadasa and published by TPH, Adyar. The latest printing of the First Series was 1988, and for the Second Series, 2002. *The K.H. Letters to C. W. Leadbeater* was reprinted in 2001 by TPH, Adyar. It was also edited by C. Jinarajadasa and contains explanatory notes and commentaries by him. All three books are available from TPH, Wheaton or from the Henry S. Olcott Memorial Library of the Theosophical Society in America.
2. See OW, 9th ed., pp. 38–144. Other editions may have different pagination.
3. Later, under special circumstances, he took over the correspondence for a brief time.
4. The student might also like to read the following pages dealing with “strict rules,” etc.: ML 207/205, C-78; ML 273–4/269–270, C-136. Also see Subba Row’s letter to Mr. Sinnett: ML 458/451; C-164.
5. She seems to be saying that she had never transmitted letters to the Masters for others, and it presented many problems (perhaps unforeseen ones). Yet she never refused to undertake the project even with its difficulties.

CHAPTER THREE

1. For a detailed description of this first letter, along with explanations of

many interesting points, see Chapter 8 of Geoffrey A. Barborka’s book, *The Mahatmas and Their Letters*.

2. ML 1. It is obvious from this letter that the Mahatma K.H. had considerable familiarity with historical events in the West. The student is reminded that he was educated in Europe. Refer to the *Readers Guide* or to *The Mahatmas and Their Letters* for explanations of some of the more obscure references.
3. The cup and saucer are carefully preserved in the archives at the international headquarters of the Theosophical Society at Adyar, Madras, India.
4. D. M. Bennett is referred to in ML 249/246, C-106; ML 260/257, C-114; and ML 261/257, C-114.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Originally conceived as “The Anglo-Indian Branch” but later changed to “The Simla Eclectic Theosophical Society.”
2. In the chronological edition, they are found principally in Letters 44, 66, 67, 68, 85A, 85B, 93A, and 93B.
3. It is understood that this was for the purpose of taking a higher initiation.
4. A brief part of this is printed in Appendix C of this study guide.
5. See also *Masters and Men*, ch. 9, pp. 122 et seq.
6. The magazine edited by HPB and Colonel Olcott. The articles were entitled “Fragments of Occult Truth.”
7. It should be recalled that the Mahatma M. was not proficient in English.

8. In the second edition of the letters, some words are missing from this paragraph; these have been supplied by the editors in the third edition.
9. See also ch. 5 in *Esoteric Buddhism*.
10. Not the ego of modern psychology; technically Atma-Buddhi-Manas, empirically “the gatherer of experience” which carries over from life to life.
11. ML. See p. 103/101; C 192-3, lower half of page. The numbering of the principles may differ slightly from some later presentations. The student should read: “When [physical] man dies, his second [prana] and third [astral] principles die with him; the lower triad disappears, and the fourth [Kama], fifth [Manas], sixth [Buddhi] and seventh [Atma] principles form the surviving *Quarternary* . . . Thenceforth it is a “death” struggle between the Upper [Buddhi-Manas] and Lower [Kama-Manas] dualities. If the upper wins, the sixth [Buddhi], having attracted to itself the quintessence of *Good* from the fifth [Manas] . . . follows its divine *elder* (the 7th) [Atma] . . . and the fifth and fourth [Manas and Kama respectively] remain in association as an empty *shell* . . .” See also p. 104/101; C-193, “. . . reborn on the next planet . . . [Read “globe of our chain” for “planet”].

CHAPTER FIVE

1. Both the Englishmen had objected to this aspect of probation. Mr. Hume, particularly, maintained that it was devious and underhanded to make an individual reveal his baser nature.

2. During part of the period covered by the correspondence, Mr. Hume wrote numerous articles for publication in *The Theosophist*, extrapolating brilliantly from the information gleaned from the letters.

CHAPTER SIX

1. The student is advised to read the Mahatma K.H.’s description of an incident of “human carelessness” on his part, which resulted in an interesting and amusing encounter with a goat. See pp. 320–21/315–16; C-302-3.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. See ML 155/152; C-313, in the paragraph headed “(5).”
2. Pantheism: The doctrine that God is not a personality but that all laws, forces, manifestations, etc. of the self-existing universe are God.
3. Boulder: Shamballa, 1975, pp. 24–5.
4. Ibid, 78.
5. Ibid, 80.
6. The relation between an object at rest and the energy stored in its mass; C = the speed of light.
7. Quoted by Albert Rosenfeld in *The Saturday Review* Dec. 10, 1977.
8. “Holistic World Views of Physicists and Mystics,” p. 135.
9. Capra, op cit.
10. Avalokiteshwara: “The On-Looking Lord”; the Higher Self. Consult one of the glossaries mentioned in Chapter 4 for further definitions.

CHAPTER NINE

1. The events which brought the correspondence to an end are related in the later chapters of *Masters and Men*.

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