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The Mahatmas of the Theosophical Society, and Their Esoteric Letters

At the end of the American Civil War a strong interest in spiritualism began to develop in America. Many Americans were reacting to hardships suffered during the civil conflagration and consequently were reaching for transcendent meaning concerning the death of their significant loved ones. This in itself set the sociological background needed to foster a spiritualist movement. Within the context of the spiritualist movement arose certain types of supernatural phenomena such as apparitions appearing, table rapping, and messages from dead departed loved ones.

Two brothers at the Eddy farm preformed the most famous of these American experiences. It is here, in 1874 that Henry Occult, a retired American officer,



and Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, a Russian mystic, met for the first time. The history of the Theosophical Society started with these two founders and has been very well documented by hundreds of students and scholars. What is often neglected or skipped over in the history of the Theosophical society by

religious scholars in general, is the Eastern Mahatmas who allegedly gave the Theosophical society their charter, commission, and doctrine.

Theosophist Virginia Hanson states: "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."ⁱ

In speaking of the Mahatmas, H. P. Blavatsky, 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 yet a 1,000 years old as imagined by some."ⁱⁱ

When speaking 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 when I was twenty.... He was at the very prime of manhood then. I am an old woman now but he has not aged a day. He is still in the prime of manhood."ⁱⁱⁱ

Annie Beasant also restated similar comprehensions concerning the Mahatmas or "Masters of Wisdom" in an article entitled "Who Are the Masters?", she comments: "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 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."^{iv}

The only proof we have of the involvement of the Mahatmas or "Masters" in the formation and maintenance of the Theosophical Society comes directly from such personal testimony by Blavatsky, Olcott, Sinnett, Beasant, and a handful of other

minor officiates of the Theosophical Society. However, many of the communications between these theosophist and the Mahatmas came through written communications by the Mahatmas themselves. This second witness of the Mahatma letters is an area deserving of scholarly attention since the Mahatmas themselves are fundamental to the Theosophical Society in the areas concerning its origin, doctrine and formation.

The Mahatma Letters

The "Mahatma Letters" were mainly written by two such Mahatmas, also known as Adepts, who were known by their pen names as Mahatma Koot Humi, and Mahatma Morya. They tended to sign their letters as "K.H." (Koot Humi), and "M." (Morya).



In the book titled *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*, edited by Christmas Humphreys and Elsie Benjamin, exactly 145 Mahatma Letters have been reproduced for posterity and research.^v These two Adepts, K.H. and M. claimed to belong to a Himalayan Brotherhood of Great Adepts.^{vi}

Master K. H. (Koot Humi) wrote most of the Mahatma Letters currently in existence. The Master Koot Humi was a Brahmin by birth, but at the time of the correspondence he was a member of the Gelugpa, or "Yellow Hat" division of Tibetan Buddhism.

Most of the ML (Mahatma Letters) were addressed to A. P. Sinnett. At the time Mr. A. P. Sinnett was the respected editor of the *Pioneer*, a leading Anglo-Indian newspaper published in Allahabad, India. The correspondence covered a period from 1880 through 1885.^{vii}

Even though the Theosophical Society was founded in New York City in November of 1875, H.P. Blavatsky and Olcott decided to move the headquarters of the TS (Theosophical Society) to India. In February of 1879, they arrived in Bombay where the English speaking community largely ignored them. It was not until October of 1879 that H.P.B. and Olcott met A. P. Sinnett in Allahabad.

The Beginning of The Mahatma Letters

In 1880, while stay at the Sinnett's summer home, H.P.B. (H. P. Blavatsky) began to perform occult phenomena for Sinnett. She gave full credit for the power to work these "signs" to her Adept teachers M. and K.H. Sinnett immediately demanded to be put in touch with these Mahatmas and soon as possible so that he too might be instructed in the secret doctrines of occultism. H.P.B. hesitated but then decided to capitulate the request.

Master M. flatly refused to participate but K. H. was willing because he was looking for a new chela (student) by which he might spread some of the teachings of the Brotherhood. The rules of the



Brotherhood were very rigid concerning the content of their esoteric knowledge, and the conservative branch of the Brotherhood was against any occult teaching being made public. However, K.H. is considered a liberal Adept politically and was given permission by the Leader of the Brotherhood to begin a

limited and audited communication.

In fact, the conservative side of the Brotherhood was always against the starting of the Theosophical Society in general. They believed the world to be still too primitive to handle the esoteric truths concerning the hidden facts about cosmology, anthropology, and etc.

The Nature of the Correspondence

Most of the actual correspondence between the Masters and Sinnett was carried on by H.P.B. herself. Since the Masters were living in the hidden regions of the Himalayas the mode of correspondences was by a process known as "psychological telegraphy." H.P.B. explains:

“An electro-magnetic connection, so to say, exists on the psychological plane between a Mahatma and his chelas, one of who 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 upon the piece of magnetically prepared paper."^{viii}

The occult process by which the words themselves appear on the paper is called precipitation. This is an extremely involved process, and any researcher can study this subject in *The Mahatmas and Their Letters*, by Geoffrey A. Barboka, pp. 109-122.

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."^{ix}

This above-mentioned process created not all letters from K.H. Many letters were handwritten and sent by mail through the conventional post offices. Still, at other times, letters were known to appear out of thin air or were delivered by a chela who had been transported thousands of miles through time and space.

Current Locations of the Original Autographs

Many of the Mahatma Letters were given irrevocably to the British Museum in 1939. In 1952 the whole of the Mahatma Letters MSS. given to the British Museum was microfilmed at the orders of the Trustees. The Museum authorities had bound the material in seven volumes originally, now the seven volumes were reduced to four reels of microfilm. Copies of the four reels were sent to various organizations, Theosophical and otherwise, including the Library of Congress in Washington.^x

The British Museum when examining the "precipitated" letters were astonished that the ink involved was not smeared by the oily paper manuscript. Barboka further using modern technological devices showed that the ink was below the oily film and was imbedded within the manuscript material itself. He also showed that the red ink and red pencil used by Master Morya in his

handwritten letters actually consisted of fifteen different colors when viewed under extreme magnification.

The British Museum also confirmed that the manuscripts that were signed Koot Humi were from one and the same author. They also confirmed the same about the few that were written by Master Morya.

In 1986, Dr. Vernon Harrison of the British Society of Psychological Research rebuked the Hodgson report of 1886 that accused H.P.B. of being the author of the Koot Humi letters because K.H. and H.P.B. both share a handwriting open gap stroke on the written characters of "q", "d", and "a". Harrison showed quite clearly that Mark Twain and President Eisenhower also had this peculiarity in their handwriting style and that it was not unique to K.H. or H.P.B. Also Virginia Hanson documents times and places when letters were written by K.H. while H.P.B. was in another part of the world and could not have known the circumstances nor had been physically able to be there.

The best argument for this was when Annie Besant in the year 1900 received the last known letter ever from the Master K.H. affirming the Brotherhood's recognition of her leadership in the Theosophical Society. H.P.B. had then been dead for seven years and could not have been the author nor foreseen the actual circumstances.^{xi}

In conclusion, it cannot be proven who Morya and Koot Humi really are. Whether they are Members of the Himalayan Brotherhood of Adepts or not, is also improvable. What is for certain, is that the content of the Mahatma letters are the foundations for the basic concepts taught by the Theosophical Society and should therefore be seriously studied in regards to their content, by objective religious scholars dedicated to truth, for its own sake, for there is no religion higher than truth.

Notes:

i. Virginia Hanson, *An Introduction to The Mahatma Letters: A Study Course* (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Society in America), p. 7.

ii. Letter to a friend, written July 1, 1890. See *The Theosophist* for September, 1951.

iii. She was only 59 years of age; she was sixty when she died.

iv. *The Theosophist*, February 1938.

v. A. T. Barker, *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* (Adyar, Madras 20, India), Third and Revised Edition by Christmas Humphreys and Elsie Benjamin. Other sources for the study of the Mahatma Letters are:

* *Readers Guide to the Mahatma Letters*, compiled and edited by George E. Linton and Virginia Hanson.

* *Masters and Men*, shows the human story in the Mahatma Letters, by Virginia Hanson.

* *The Mahatmas and Their Letters*, by Geoffrey A. Barboka, is invaluable for its in-depth treatment of several letters.

* *Old Diary Leaves*, by Henry Steels Olcott, the first three volumes.

vi. We learn from the Mahatma Letters that several such occult groups exist. ML 393. (ML = *Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*)

vii. Virginia Hanson, p. 13.

viii. *The Theosophist*, Vol. V, p. 64; see also *Collected Works VI*, 118-121.

ix. ML 22

x. A. T. Barker, preface xiv.

xi. The Video, *The Mahatma Letters of the Theosophical Society* (Wheaton: Il, Quest Books), 38 minutes, VHS format. This video documents every aspect of the Mahatma letters from the stand point of textual criticism as well as historical criticism.