

Yogis and Mahatmas



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Questions from a reader of “The Theosophist”

Will you or any of your readers enlighten me on the following points:

- 1 What is a Yogi?
- 2 Can he be classed with a Mahatma?
- 3 Can Viśvamisra, Valmiki, Vasishtha and other Rishis be classed with the Yogis and the Mahatmas?
- 4 Or, with the Mahatmas only?
- 5 Or, with the Yogis only?
- 6 Did the Yogis know Occult Science?
- 7 Is vegetarianism necessary for the study and development of Occult Science?
- 8 Did our Rishis know Occult sciences?

By throwing some light on the above questions you will oblige.

Yours truly,

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Bombay, April 30th, 1883
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Reply by H.P. Blavatsky

- 1 A Yogi in India is a very elastic word. It now serves generally to designate a very dirty, dung-covered and naked individual, who never cuts nor combs his hair, covers himself from forehead to heels with wet ashes, performs *Pranayam*, without realizing its true meaning, and lives upon alms. It is only occasionally that the name is applied to one who is worthy of the appellation. The real meaning, however, of the word when analysed etymologically, will show that its root is “yug” — *to join* — and thus will yield its real significance. A real Yogi is a person who, having entirely divorced himself from the world, its attractions and pleasures, has succeeded after a more or less long period of training, to reunite his soul with the “universal Soul” or to “join” with Parabrahm. If by the word “Yogi” our correspondent means the latter individual, *viz.*, one who has linked his seventh and sixth principles or Atman and Buddhi and placed thereby his lower principles (Manas, the animal soul and the *personal ego*) *en rapport* with the Universal Principle, then:
- 2 He may be classed with the Mahatmas, since this word means simply a “great soul.” Therefore query —
- 3 Is an idle question to make. The Rishis — at any rate those who can be proved to have actually lived (since many of those who are mentioned under the above designation are more or less mythical) were of course “Mahatmas,” in the broad sense of the word. The three Rishis named by our questioner were historical personages and were very high adepts entitled to be called Mahatmas.
- 4 They may be *Mahatmas* (whenever worthy of the appellation), and whether married or celibate, while they can be called:
- 5 “Yogis” — only when remaining single, *viz.*, after devoting their lives to religious contemplation, asceticism and — celibacy.¹
- 6 Theoretically every *real* Yogi knows more or less the Occult sciences; that is to say, he must understand the secret and symbolical meaning of every prescribed rite, as the correct significance of the allegories contained in the *Vedas* and other sacred books. Practically, nowadays very few, if any, of those Yogis whom one meets with occasionally are familiar with occultism. It depends upon their degree of intellectual development and religious bigotry. A very saintly, sincere, yet ignorantly pious ascetic, who has not penetrated far beyond the husks of his philosophical doctrine would tell you that no one in *Kali-Yuga* is permitted to become a *practical* occultist; while an initiated Yogi has to be an occultist; at any rate, he has to be sufficiently powerful to produce all the *minor* phenomena (the ignorant would still call even such minor manifestation — “miracles”) of adeptship. The real Yogis, the heirs to the wisdom of the Āryan Rishis, are not to be met, however, in the world mixing with the profane and allowing themselves to be known as Yogis. Happy are they to whom the whole world is open, and who know it from their inaccessible *aśramas*, while the world (with the ex-

¹ [Cf. “Marriage, Divorce, and Celibacy” in our Blavatsky Speaks Series. — ED. PHIL.]

ception of a very few) knowing them not, denies their very existence. But, it really is not a matter of great concern with them whether people at large believe in, or know of them.

- 7 The exposition of “Occultism” in these columns has been clear enough to show that it is the Science by the study and practice of which the student can become a MAHATMA. The articles “The Elixir of Life,” and the *Hints on Esoteric Theosophy*² are clear enough on this point. They also explain scientifically the necessity of being a vegetarian for the purposes of psychic development. Read and study, and you will find why Vegetarianism, Celibacy, and especially total abstinence from wine and spirituous drink are strictly necessary for “the development of Occult knowledge” — see *Hints on Esoteric Theosophy*, No. 2.
- 8 Question 8 being unnecessary in view of the aforesaid, we close the explanation.



² [Issued under the Authority of The Theosophical Society in 1882. Published anonymously, but actually written by Allan O. Hume, Nos. 1 and 2.]