

Chelas and Lay Chelas



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During the eleven years of the existence of the Theosophical Society I have known, out of the seventy-two regularly accepted chelas on probation and the hundreds of lay candidates — only three who have not hitherto failed, and one only who had a full success.

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Can the Mahatmas be selfish?

True knowledge consists in getting at the root of all phenomena, and thus arriving at a correct understanding of the primal cause, the “rootless root,” which is not an effect in its turn but THAT, the ever incomprehensible Causeless Cause (Be-ness) of both spirit and matter, and the oldest dogma in Occultism.

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Is the desire to live selfish?

The only difference between an ordinary man, who works along with Nature during the course of cosmic evolution, and an Occultist, is that the latter, by his superior knowledge, adopts such methods of training and discipline as to quicken the process of his evolution, and thus ascend in a comparatively short period of time to that apex of physical and spiritual perfection (a god on earth) towards which the ordinary man may take billions of years to reach.

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Beyond the Hall of Learning is the Great White Lodge, the magnificent hierarchy of Masters, Gurus and Chelas all over the world.

Every aspirant to chelaship has a Guru, although he many not be aware of it. Guru is the chela’s benefactor.

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If we have revered our teacher, we will now revere our unknown Guru. We must place our hand in his hand with all love, and trust, and confidence, for it is to mighty Karma we have appealed, and the Guru is an agent of Karma.

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HIGHER ETHICS AND DEVOTION SERIES
CHELA AND LAY CHELAS

The faith and love between Guru and chela act as a stimulus to both, and as a purifier to the mind of the chela. 30

The business of the Guru is to keep adjusting the chela's progress, and not to submerge him with knowledge, or push him forward. 30

The Guru–chela affinity is sacred and precious, not lightly taken up or lightly dropped. 31

Suggested reading for students.

From our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series. 32



Chela is an unfortunate man . . .

. . . a man who has entered upon “a path not manifest that is the most difficult path,” as Krishna says.

First published in *The Theosophist*, Vol. VI, No. 1 (61), October 1884, p. 1.
Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (CHELAS) VI p. 285-87.

Notwithstanding the many articles which have appeared in this magazine upon the above subject, much misunderstanding and many false views seem to still prevail.

What are Chelas, and what are their powers? Have they faults, and in what particular are they different from people who are not Chelas? Is every word uttered by a Chela to be taken as gospel truth?

These questions arise because many persons have entertained very absurd views for a time about Chelas, and when it was found that those views should be changed, the reaction has been in several cases quite violent.

The word “Chela” simply means *a disciple*; but it has become crystallized in the literature of Theosophy, and has, in different minds, as many different definitions as the word “God” itself. Some persons have gone so far as to say that when a man is a Chela he is at once put upon a plane when each word that he may unfortunately utter is taken down as *ex cathedra*, and he is not allowed the poor privilege of talking like an ordinary person. If it be found out that any such utterance was on his own account and responsibility, he is charged with having misled his hearers.

Now this wrong idea must be corrected once for all. There are Chelas and Chelas, just as there are MAHATMAS and MAHATMAS. There are MAHATMAS in fact who are themselves the Chelas of those who are higher yet. But no one, for an instant, would confound a Chela who has just begun his troublous journey with that greater Chela who is a MAHATMA.

In fact the Chela is an unfortunate man who has entered upon “a path not manifest,” and Krishna says that “that is the most difficult path.”

Instead of being the constant mouthpiece of his Guru, he finds himself left more alone in the world than those who are not Chelas, and his path is surrounded by dangers which would appal many an aspirant, were they depicted in natural colours, so that instead of accepting his Guru and passing an entrance examination with a view to becoming Bachelor of the Art of Occultism under his master’s constant and friendly guidance, he really forces his way into a guarded enclosure, and has from that moment to fight and conquer — or die. Instead of accepting, he has to be worthy of acceptance. Nor must he offer himself. One of the Mahatmas has, within the year, written

Never thrust yourself upon us for Chelaship; wait until it descends upon you.

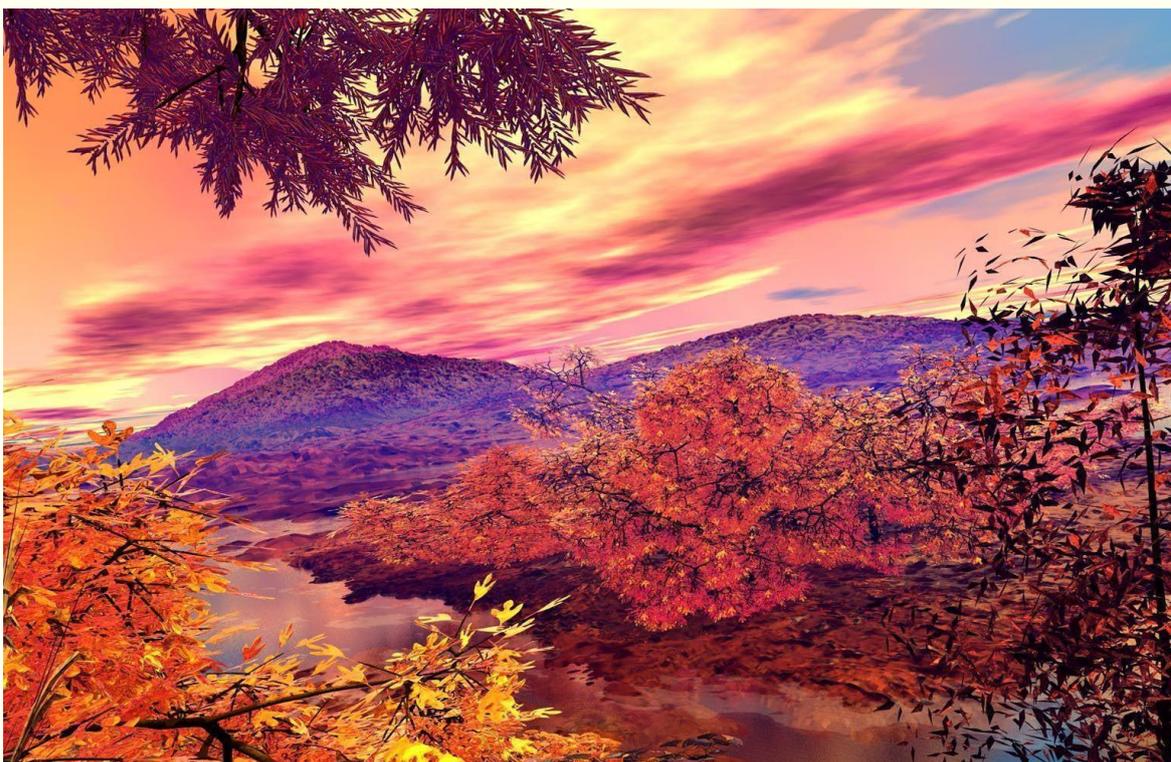
And having been accepted as a Chela, it is not true that he is merely the instrument of his Guru. He speaks as ordinary men then as before, and it is only when the master sends by means of the Chela’s Magnetism an actual written letter, that the lookers-on can say that through him a communication came.

It may happen with them, as it does with any author occasionally, that they evolve either true or beautiful utterances, but it must not be therefore concluded that during that utterance the Guru was speaking through the Chela. If there was the germ of a good thought in the mind, the Guru's influence, like the gentle rain upon the seed, may have caused it to spring into sudden life and abnormally blossom, but that is not the master's voice. The cases in fact are rare in which the masters speak through a Chela.

The powers of Chelas vary with their progress; and every one should know that if a Chela has any "powers," he is not permitted to use them save in rare and exceptional cases, and never may he boast of their possession. So it must follow that those who are only beginners have no more or greater power than an ordinary man. Indeed the goal set before the Chela is not the acquisition of psychological power; his chief task is to divest himself of that overmastering sense of personality which is the thick veil that hides from sight our immortal part — the real man. So long as he allows this feeling to remain, just so long will he be fixed at the very door of Occultism, unable to proceed further.

Sentimentality, then, is not the equipment for a Chela. His work is hard, his road stony, the end far away. With sentimentality merely he will not advance at all. Is he waiting for the master to bid him show his courage by precipitating himself from a precipice, or by braving the cold Himalayan steeps? False hope; they will not call him thus. And so, as he is not to clothe himself in sentiment, the public must not, when they wish to consider him, throw a false veil of sentimentality over all his actions and words.

Let us therefore, henceforth, see a little more discrimination used in looking at Chelas.



Pledged Chelas and Lay Chelas.

First published in *The Theosophist*, Vol. IV, Supplement to No. 10, July 1883, pp. 10-11.
Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (CHELAS AND LAY CHELAS) IV pp. 606-14.

As the word Chela has, among others, been introduced by Theosophy into the nomenclature of Western metaphysics, and the circulation of our magazine is constantly widening, it will be as well if some more definite explanation than heretofore is given with respect to the meaning of this term and the rules of Chelaship, for the benefit of our European if not Eastern members. A “Chela” then, is one who has offered himself or herself as a pupil to learn practically the “hidden mysteries of Nature and the psychical powers latent in man.” The spiritual teacher to whom he proposes his candidature is called in India a *Guru*; and the real Guru is always an Adept in the Occult Science. A man of profound knowledge, exoteric and esoteric, especially the latter; and one who has brought his carnal nature under subjection of the WILL; who has developed in himself both the power (*Siddhi*) to control the forces of nature, and the capacity to probe her secrets by the help of the formerly latent but now active powers of his being — this is the real Guru. To offer oneself as a candidate for Chelaship is easy enough, to develop into an Adept the most difficult task any man could possibly undertake. There are scores of “natural-born” poets, mathematicians, mechanics, statesmen, etc., but a natural-born Adept is something practically impossible. For, though we do hear at very rare intervals of one who has an extraordinary innate capacity for the acquisition of occult knowledge and power, yet even he has to pass the self-same tests and probations, and go through the same self-training as any less endowed fellow aspirant. In this matter it is most true that there is no royal road by which favourites may travel.

For centuries the selection of Chelas — outside the hereditary group within the *gonpa* (temple) — has been made by the Himalayan Mahatmas themselves from among the class — in Tibet, a considerable one as to number — of natural mystics. The only exceptions have been in the cases of Western men like Fludd, Thomas Vaughan, Paracelsus, Pico della Mirandola, Count de Saint-Germain, etc., whose temperamental affinity to this celestial science more or less forced the distant Adepts to come into personal relations with them, and enabled them to get such small (or large) proportion of the whole truth as was possible under their social surroundings. From Book IV of *Kiu-te*, chapter on “the Laws of Upāsana,” we learn that the qualifications expected in a Chela were:

- Perfect physical health;
- Absolute mental and physical purity;
- Unselfishness of purpose; universal charity; pity for all animate beings;
- Truthfulness and unswerving faith in the law of Karma, independent of any power in nature that could interfere: a law whose course is not to be obstructed by any agency, not to be caused to deviate by prayer or propitiatory exoteric ceremonies;
- A courage undaunted in every emergency, even by peril to life;

- An intuitional perception of one's being the vehicle of the manifested Avalokiteśvara or Divine Atman (Spirit);
- Calm indifference for, but a just appreciation of everything that constitutes the objective and transitory world, in its relation with, and to, the invisible regions.

Such, at the least, must have been the recommendations of one aspiring to perfect Chelaship. With the sole exception of the first, which in rare and exceptional cases might have been modified, each one of these points has been invariably insisted upon, and all must have been more or less developed in the inner nature by the Chela's UNHELPED EXERTIONS, before he could be actually put to the test.

When the self-evolving ascetic — whether in, or outside the active world — had placed himself, according to his natural capacity, above, hence made himself master of, his

- 1 *Śarīra* — body;
- 2 *Indriya* — senses;
- 3 *Dosha* — faults;
- 4 *Duhkha* — pain; and is ready to become one with his
- 5 *Manas* — mind;
- 6 *Buddhi* — intellection, or spiritual intelligence; and
- 7 *Ātma* — highest soul, *i.e.*, spirit.

When he is ready for this, and, further, to recognize in *Ātma* the highest ruler in the world of perceptions, and in the will, the highest executive energy (power), then may he, under the time-honoured rules, be taken in hand by one of the Initiates. He may then be shown the mysterious path at whose thither end the Chela is taught the unerring discernment of *Phala*, or the fruits of causes produced, and given the means of reaching *Apavarga* — emancipation, from the misery of repeated births (in whose determination the ignorant has no hand), and thus of avoiding *Pretya-bhava* — transmigration.

But since the advent of the Theosophical Society, one of whose arduous tasks it was to reawaken in the Āryan mind the dormant memory of the existence of this science and of those transcendent human capabilities, the rules of Chela selection have become slightly relaxed in one respect. Many members of the Society becoming convinced by practical proof upon the above points, and rightly enough thinking that if other men had hitherto reached the goal, they too if inherently fitted, might reach it by following the same path, pressed to be taken as candidates. And as it would be an interference with Karma to deny them the chance of at least beginning — since they were so importunate, they were given it. The results have been far from encouraging so far, and it is to show these unfortunates the cause of their failure as much as to warn others against rushing heedlessly upon a similar fate, that the writing of the present article has been ordered. The candidates in question, though plainly warned against it in advance, began wrong by selfishly looking to the future and losing sight of the past. They forgot that they had done nothing to deserve the rare honour of selection, nothing which warranted their expecting such a privilege; that they could

boast of none of the above enumerated merits. As men of the selfish, sensual world, whether married or single, merchants, civilian or military employees, or members of the learned professions, they had been to a school most calculated to assimilate them to the animal nature, least so to develop their spiritual potentialities. Yet each and all had vanity enough to suppose that their case would be made an exception to the law of countless centuries' establishment as though, indeed, in their person had been born to the world a new *Avatāra!* All expected to have hidden things taught, extraordinary powers given them because — well, because they had joined the Theosophical Society. Some had sincerely resolved to amend their lives, and give up their evil courses: we must do them that justice, at all events.

All were refused at first, Col. Olcott, the President, himself, to begin with: and as to the latter gentleman there is now no harm in saying that he was not formally accepted as a Chela until he had proved by more than a year's devoted labours and by a determination which brooked no denial, that he might safely be tested. Then from all sides came complaints — from Hindus, who ought to have known better, as well as from Europeans who, of course, were not in a condition to know anything at all about the rules. The cry was that unless at least a few Theosophists were given the chance to try, the Society could not endure. Every other noble and unselfish feature of our programme was ignored — a man's duty to his neighbour, to his country, his duty to help, enlighten, encourage and elevate those weaker and less favoured than he; all were trampled out of sight in the insane rush for adeptship. The call for phenomena, phenomena, phenomena, resounded in every quarter, and the Founders were impeded in their real work and teased importunately to intercede with the Mahatmas, against whom the real grievance lay, though their poor agents had to take all the buffets. At last, the word came from the higher authorities that a few of the most urgent candidates should be taken at their word. The result of the experiment would perhaps show better than any amount of preaching what Chelaship meant, and what are the consequences of selfishness and temerity. Each candidate was warned that he must wait for years in any event, before his fitness could be proven, and that he must pass through a series of tests that would bring out all there was in him, whether bad or good. They were nearly all married men and hence were designated "Lay Chelas" — a term new in English, but having long had its equivalent in Asiatic tongues. A Lay Chela is but a man of the world who affirms his desire to become wise in spiritual things. Virtually, every member of the Theosophical Society who subscribes to the second of our three "Declared Objects" is such; for though not of the number of true Chelas, he has yet the possibility of becoming one, for he has stepped across the boundary line which separated him from the Mahatmas, and has brought himself, as it were, under their notice. In joining the Society and binding himself to help along its work, he has pledged himself to act in some degree in concert with those Mahatmas, at whose behest the Society was organized, and under whose conditional protection it remains. The joining is then, the introduction; all the rest depends entirely upon the member himself, and he need never expect the most distant approach to the "favour" of one of our Mahatmas, or any other Mahatmas in the world should the latter consent to become known — that has not been fully earned by personal merit. The *Mahatmas are the servants, not the arbiters of the Law of Karma.* LAY CHELASHIP CONFERS NO PRIVILEGE UPON ANYONE EXCEPT THAT OF

WORKING FOR MERIT UNDER THE OBSERVATION OF A MASTER. And whether that Master be or be not seen by the Chela makes no difference whatever as to the result: his good thought, words and deeds will bear their fruits, his evil ones, theirs. To boast of Lay Chelaship or make a parade of it, is the surest way to reduce the relationship with the Guru to a mere empty name, for it would be *prima facie* evidence of vanity and unfitness for further progress. And for years we have been teaching everywhere the maxim “First deserve, then desire” intimacy with the Mahatmas.

Now there is a terrible law operative in nature, one which cannot be altered, and whose operation clears up the apparent mystery of the selection of certain “Chelas” who have turned out sorry specimens of morality, these few years past. Does the reader recall the old proverb: “Let sleeping dogs lie?”¹ There is a world of occult meaning in it. No man or woman knows his or her moral strength until it is tried. Thousands go through life very respectably because they were never put to the pinch. This is a truism doubtless, but it is most pertinent to the present case. One who undertakes to try for Chelaship by that very act rouses and lashes to desperation every sleeping passion of his animal nature. For this is the commencement of a struggle for the mastery in which quarter is neither to be given nor taken. It is, once for all: “To be, or Not to be”; to conquer, means ADEPTSHIP; to fail, an ignoble Martyrdom; for to fall victim to lust, pride, avarice, vanity, selfishness, cowardice, or any other of the lower propensities, is indeed ignoble, if measured by the standard of true manhood. The Chela is not only called to face all the latent evil propensities of his nature, but, in addition, the whole volume of maleficent power accumulated by the community and nation to which he belongs. For he is an integral part of those aggregates, and what affects either the individual man, or the group (town or nation) reacts upon the other. And in this instance his struggle for goodness jars upon the whole body of badness in his environment, and draws its fury upon him. If he is content to go along with his neighbours and be almost as they are — perhaps a little better or somewhat worse than the average — no one may give him a thought. But let it be known that he has been able to detect the hollow mockery of social life, its hypocrisy, selfishness, sensuality, cupidity and other bad features, and has determined to lift himself up to a higher level, at once he is hated, and every bad, or bigoted, or malicious nature sends at him a current of opposing will power. If he is innately strong he shakes it off, as the powerful swimmer dashes through the current that would bear a weaker one away. But in this moral battle, if the Chela has one single hidden blemish — do what he may, it *shall* and *will* be brought to light. The varnish of conventionalities which “civilization” overlays us all with must come off to the last coat, and the Inner Self, naked and without the slightest veil to conceal its reality, is exposed. The habits of society which hold men to a certain degree under moral restraint, and compel them to pay tribute to virtue by seeming to be good whether they are so or not, these habits are apt to be all forgotten, these restraints to be all broken through under the strain of Chelaship. He is now in an atmosphere of illusions — *Māyā*. Vice puts on its most alluring face, and the tempting passions try to lure the inexperienced aspirant to the depths of psychic debasement. This is not a case like that depicted by a great artist, where Satan is seen playing a game of chess with a

¹ [Leave them be, or they might wake up and bite you!]

man upon the stake of his soul, while the latter's good angel stands beside him to counsel and assist. For the strife is in this instance between the Chela's Will and his carnal nature, and Karma forbids that any angel or Guru should interfere until the result is known. With the vividness of poetic fancy Bulwer Lytton has idealized it for us in his *Zanoni*, a work which will ever be prized by the occultist; while in his *Strange Story* he has with equal power shown the black side of occult research and its deadly perils. Chelaship was defined, the other day, by a Mahatma as a "psychic resolvent, which eats away all dross and leaves only the pure gold behind." If the candidate has the latent lust for money, or political chicanery, or materialistic scepticism, or vain display, or false speaking, or cruelty, or sensual gratification of any kind, the germ is almost sure to sprout; and so, on the other hand, as regards the noble qualities of human nature. The real man comes out. Is it not the height of folly, then, for anyone to leave the smooth path of commonplace life to scale the crags of Chelaship without some reasonable feeling of certainty that he has the right stuff in him? Well says the Bible: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"¹ — a text that would-be Chelas should consider well before they rush headlong into the fray! It would have been well for some of our Lay Chelas if they had thought twice before defying the tests. *We call to mind several sad failures within a twelve-month.* One went bad in the head, recanted noble sentiments uttered but a few weeks previously, and became a member of a religion he had just scornfully and unanswerably proven false. A second became a defaulter and absconded with his employer's money — the latter also a Theosophist. A third gave himself up to gross debauchery, and confessed it with ineffectual sobs and tears, to his chosen Guru. A fourth got entangled with a person of the other sex and fell out with his dearest and truest friends. A fifth showed signs of mental aberration and was brought into Court upon charges of discreditable conduct. A sixth shot himself to escape the consequences of criminality, on the verge of detection! And so we might go on and on. All these were apparently sincere searchers after truth, and passed in the world for respectable persons. Externally, they were fairly eligible as candidates for Chelaship, as appearances go; but "within all was rottenness and dead men's bones."² The world's varnish was so thick as to hide the absence of the true gold underneath; and the "resolvent" doing its work, the candidate proved in each instance but a gilded figure of moral dross, from circumference to core. . . .

In what precedes we have, of course, dealt but with the failures among Lay Chelas; there have been partial successes too, and these are passing gradually through the first stages of their probation. Some are making themselves useful to the Society and to the world in general by good example and precept. If they persist, well for them, well for us all: the odds are fearfully against them, but still "there is no Impossibility to him who WILLs." The difficulties in Chelaship will never be less until human nature changes and a new sort is evolved. St. Paul³ might have had a Chela in mind when he said "to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find

¹ [1 Corinthians x, 12]

² [Matthew xxiii, 27]

³ Romans vii, 18-19

not. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do.”
And in the wise *Kirātārajuniya* of Bhāravi it is written:

The enemies which rise within the body,
Hard to be overcome — the evil passions —
Should manfully be fought; *who conquers these*
*Is equal to the conqueror of worlds.*¹



¹ XI, 32

How may it be possible for anyone, who has no independent means, to subsist upon entering Chelaship?

First published in *Lucifer*, Vol. IV, No. 22, June 1889, pp. 347-48. [A question from C.S., Stockholm.]
Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (A FEW QUERIES) XI pp. 300-1 & fn.

As you kindly invite questions relating to Theosophy, I make free to put forward some doubts, which I should feel very thankful if you would solve.

[Question 2] How may it be possible for anyone who has no independent means to subsist upon to enter upon Chelaship? It seems as if the very first indispensable rule laid down in the April number of *Lucifer*, would render it absolutely impossible for any person, who has to earn his bread in any way, save perhaps that of writing books, to mount even the first steps of the ladder. Or does it mean, perchance, that some other human being should always sacrifice himself, should toil and labour many years of his life in order to facilitate the sublime aspirings to Adeptship — of another? One would think, in that case, that the humbler brother or sister (humanly, not kindredly speaking) was on the righter track to perfection according to the precepts of Theosophy.

Hoping for an elucidating answer in the pages of *Lucifer*.

Reply by Madame Blavatsky.

Chelaship has nothing *whatever* to do with means of subsistence or anything of the kind, for a man can isolate his mind entirely from his body and its surroundings. Chelaship is a *state of mind*, rather than a life according to hard and fast rules on the physical plane. This applies especially to the earlier, probationary period, while the rules given in *Lucifer* for April last [1889] pertain properly to a later stage, that of actual occult training and the development of occult powers and insight. These rules indicate, however, the mode of life which ought to be followed by all aspirants *so far as practicable*, since it is the most helpful to them in their aspirations.

It should never be forgotten that Occultism is concerned with the *inner man* who must be strengthened and freed from the dominion of the physical body and its surroundings, which must become his servants. Hence the *first* and chief necessity of Chelaship is a spirit of absolute unselfishness and devotion to Truth; then follow self-knowledge and self-mastery. These are all-important; while outward observance of fixed rules of life is a matter of secondary moment.



Are Chelas mediums?

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According to the newest edition of the *Imperial Dictionary*, by John Ogilvie, LL.D., a medium “*is a person through whom the action of another being is said to be manifested and transmitted by animal magnetism, or a person through whom spiritual manifestations are claimed to be made, especially one who is said to be capable of holding intercourse with the spirits of the deceased.*”

As Occultists do not believe in any communication with the “spirits of the deceased” in the ordinary acceptance of the term, for the simple reason that they know that the *spirits* of “the deceased” cannot and do not come down and communicate with us; and as the above expression “*by animal magnetism*” would probably have been modified, if the editor of the *Imperial Dictionary* had been an Occultist, we therefore are only concerned with the first part of the definition of the word “Medium,” which says: a medium “*is a person through whom the action of another being is said to be manifested and transmitted*”; and we should like to be permitted to add: “*By the either consciously or unconsciously active will of that other being.*”

It would be extremely difficult to find on earth a human being, who could not be more or less influenced by the “*Animal Magnetism*” or by the active *Will* (which sends out that “*Magnetism*”) of another. If the beloved General rides along the front, the soldiers become all “*Mediums.*” They become filled with enthusiasm, they follow him without fear, and storm the death-dealing battery. One common impulse pervades them all; each one becomes the “*Medium*” of another, the coward becomes filled with heroism, and only he, who is *no medium* at all and therefore insensible to epidemic or endemic moral influences, will make an exception, assert his independence and run away.

The “revival preacher” will get up in his pulpit, and although what he says is the most incongruous nonsense, still his actions and the lamenting tone of his voice are sufficiently impressive to produce “a change of heart” amongst, at least, the female part of his congregation, and if he is a powerful man, even sceptics “that came to scoff, remain to pray.” People go to the theatre and shed tears or “split their sides” with laughter according to the character of the performance, whether it be a pantomime, a tragedy or a farce. There is no man, except a genuine block-head, whose emotions and consequently whose actions cannot be influenced in some way or other, and thereby *the action of another be manifested or transmitted through him*. All men and all women and children are therefore *Mediums*, and a person who is not a *Medium* is a monster, an abortion of nature; because he stands without the pale of humanity.

The above definition can therefore hardly be considered sufficient to express the meaning of the word “Medium” in the popular acceptance of the term, unless we add a few words, and say: “A medium is a person through whom the action of another being is said to be manifested and transmitted *to an abnormal extent* by the consciously or unconsciously active will of that other being.” This reduces the number of “Mediums” in the world to an extent proportionate to the space around which we

draw the line between the normal and abnormal, and it will be just as difficult to determine who is a medium and who is not a medium, as it is to say where sanity ends and where insanity begins. Every man has his little “weaknesses,” and every man has his little “mediumship”; that is to say, some vulnerable point, by which he may be taken unawares. The one may therefore not be considered really insane; neither can the other be called a “medium.” Opinions often differ, whether a man is insane or not, and so they may differ as to his mediumship. Now in practical life a man may be very eccentric, but he is not considered insane, until his insanity reaches such a degree, that he does not know any more what he is doing, and is therefore unable to take care of himself or his business.

We may extend the same line of reasoning to Mediums, and say that only such persons shall be considered mediums, who allow other beings to influence them in the above described manner *to such an extent that they lose their self-control* and have no more power or will of their own to regulate their own actions. Now such a relinquishing of self-control may be either active or passive, conscious or unconscious, voluntary or involuntary, and differs according to the nature of the beings, who exercise the said active influence over the medium.

A person may consciously and voluntarily submit his will to another being and become his slave. This other being may be a human being, and the medium will then be his obedient servant and may be used by him for good or bad purposes. This other “being” may be an idea, such as love, greediness, hate, jealousy, avarice, or some other passion, and the effect on the medium will be proportionate to the strength of the idea and the amount of self-control left in the medium. This “other being” may be an elementary or an elemental, and the poor medium become an epileptic, a maniac or a criminal. This “other being” may be the man’s own higher principle, either alone or put into rapport with another ray of the collective universal spiritual principle, and the “medium” will then be a great genius, a writer, a poet, an artist, a musician, an inventor, and so on. This “other being” may be one of those exalted beings, called Mahatmas, and the conscious and voluntary medium will then be called their “Chela.”

Again, a person may never in his life have heard the word “Medium” and still be a strong Medium, although entirely unconscious of the fact. His actions may be more or less influenced unconsciously by his visible or invisible surroundings. He may become a prey to Elementaries or Elementals, even without knowing the meaning of these words, and he may consequently become a thief, a murderer, a ravisher, a drunkard or a cut-throat, and it has often enough been proved that crimes frequently become epidemic; or again he may by certain invisible influences be made to accomplish acts which are not at all consistent with his character such as previously known. He may be a great liar and for once by some unseen influence be induced to speak the truth; he may be ordinarily very much afraid and yet on some great occasion and on the spur of the moment commit an act of heroism; he may be a street-robber and vagabond and suddenly do an act of generosity, etc.

Furthermore, a medium may know the sources from which the influence comes, or in more explicit terms, *the nature of the being, whose action is transmitted through him*, or he may not know it. He may be under the influence of his own seventh principle

and imagine to be in communication with a personal Jesus Christ, or a saint; he may be in rapport with the “intellectual” ray of Shakespeare and write Shakespearean poetry, and at the same time imagine that the personal spirit of Shakespeare is writing through him, and the simple fact of his believing this or that, would make his poetry neither better nor worse. He may be influenced by some Adept to write a great scientific work and be entirely ignorant of the source of his inspiration, or perhaps imagine that it was the “spirit” of Faraday or Lord Bacon that is writing through him, while all the while he would be acting as a “Chela,” although ignorant of the fact.

From all this it follows that the exercise of mediumship consists in the more or less complete giving up of self-control, and whether this exercise is good or bad, depends entirely on the use that is made of it and the purpose for which it is done. This again depends on the degree of knowledge which the mediumistic person possesses, in regard to the nature of the being to whose care he either voluntarily or involuntarily relinquishes for a time the guardianship of his physical or intellectual powers. A person who entrusts indiscriminately those faculties to the influences of every unknown power, is undoubtedly a “crank,” and cannot be considered less insane than the one who would entrust his money and valuables to the first stranger or vagabond that would ask him for the same. We meet occasionally such people, although they are comparatively rare, and they are usually known by their idiotic stare and by the fanaticism with which they cling to their ignorance. Such people ought to be pitied instead of blamed, and if it were possible, they should be enlightened in regard to the danger which they incur; but whether a Chela, who consciously and willingly lends for a time his mental faculties to a superior being, whom he knows, and in whose purity of motives, honesty of purpose, intelligence, wisdom and power he has full confidence, can be considered a “Medium” in the vulgar acceptance of the term, is a question which had better be left to the reader — after due consideration of the above to decide for himself.



The Theosophical Mahatmas.

During the eleven years of the existence of the Theosophical Society I have known,¹ out of the seventy-two regularly accepted chelas on probation and the hundreds of lay candidates — only three who have not hitherto failed, and one only who had a full success.

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Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (“THE THEOSOPHICAL MAHATMAS”) VII pp. 241-49.

It is with sincere and profound regret — though with no surprise, prepared as I am for years for such declarations — that I have read in the Rochester *Occult Word*, edited by Mrs. J. Cables, the devoted president of the T.S.² of that place, her joint editorial with Mr. W.T. Brown. This sudden revulsion of feeling is perhaps quite natural in the lady, for she has never had the opportunities given her as Mr. Brown has; and her feeling when she writes that after “a great desire . . . to be put into communication with the Theosophical Mahatmas we [they] have come to the conclusion that it is useless to strain the psychical eyes towards the Himalayas . . . ” is undeniably shared by many theosophists. Whether the complaints are justified, and also whether it is the “Mahatmas” or theosophists themselves who are to blame for it is a question that remains to be settled. It has been a pending case for several years and will have to be now decided, as the two complainants declare over their signatures that “we [they] need not run after Oriental mystics, *who deny their ability to help us.*” The last sentence, in italics, has to be seriously examined. I ask the privilege to make a few remarks thereon.

To begin with, the tone of the whole article is that of a true *manifesto*. Condensed and weeded of its exuberance of Biblical expressions it comes to this paraphractical declaration: “We have knocked at their door, and they have not answered us; we have prayed for bread, they have denied us even a stone.” The charge is quite serious; nevertheless, that it is neither just nor fair — is what I propose to show.

As I was the first in the United States to bring the existence of our Masters into publicity; and, having exposed the holy names of two members of a Brotherhood hitherto unknown to Europe and America (save to a few mystics and Initiates of every age), yet sacred and revered throughout the East, and especially India, causing vulgar speculation and curiosity to grow around those blessed names, and finally leading to a public rebuke, I believe it my duty to contradict the fitness of the latter by explaining the whole situation, as I feel myself the chief culprit. It may do good to some, perchance, and will interest some others.

Let no one think withal, that I come out as a champion or a defender of those who most assuredly need no defence. What I intend, is to present simple *facts*, and let after this the situation be judged on its own merits. To the plain statement of our brothers and sisters that they have been “living on husks,” “hunting after strange gods” without receiving admittance, I would ask in my turn, as plainly: “Are you sure of having knocked at the right door? Do you feel certain that you have not lost your

¹ [1875-1886]

² [Theosophical Society]

way by *stopping so often on your journey at strange doors, behind which lie in wait the fiercest enemies of those you were searching for?* Our MASTERS are not “a jealous god”; they are simply holy mortals, nevertheless, however, higher than any in this world, morally, intellectually and spiritually. However holy and advanced in the science of the Mysteries — they are still men, members of a Brotherhood, who are the first in it to show themselves subservient to its time-honoured laws and rules. And one of the first rules in it demands that those who start on the journey *Eastward*, as candidates to the notice and favours of those who are the custodians of those Mysteries, should proceed by the straight road, without stopping on every sideway and path seeking to join other “Masters” and professors often of the Left-Hand Science, that they should have confidence and show trust and patience, besides several other conditions to fulfil. Failing in all of this from first to last, what right has any man or woman to complain of the liability of the Masters to help them?

Truly “The Dwellers of the Threshold’ are within!”

Once that a theosophist would become a candidate for either *chelaship* or favours, he must be aware of the mutual pledge, tacitly, if not formally offered and accepted between the two parties, and, *that such a pledge is sacred*. It is a bond of *seven* years of probation. If during that time, notwithstanding the many human shortcomings and mistakes of the candidate (save two which it is needless to specify in print) he remains throughout every temptation *true to the chosen Master*, or Masters (in the case of *lay* candidates), and as faithful to the Society founded at their wish and under their orders, then the theosophist will be initiated into * * * thenceforward allowed to communicate with his *guru* unreservedly, all his failings, save this one, as specified, may be overlooked: they belong to his future *Karma*, but are left for the present, to the discretion and judgment of the Master. He alone has the power of judging whether even during those long seven years the *chela* will be favoured regardless of his mistakes and sins, with occasional communications with, and from the guru. The latter thoroughly posted as to the causes and motives that led the candidate into sins of omission and commission is the only one to judge of the advisability or inadvisability of bestowing encouragement; as he alone is entitled to it, seeing that he is himself under the inexorable law of Karma, which no one from the Zulu savage up to the highest archangel can avoid — and that he has to assume the great responsibility of the causes created by himself.

Thus, the chief and the only indispensable condition required in the candidate or chela on probation, is simply unswerving fidelity to the chosen Master and his purposes. This is a condition *sine qua non*; not as I have said, on account of any jealous feeling, but simply because *the magnetic rapport between the two once broken, it becomes at each time doubly difficult to re-establish it again*; and that it is neither just nor fair, that the Masters should strain their powers for those whose future course and final desertion they very often can plainly foresee. Yet, how many of those, who, expecting as I would call it “favours by anticipation,” and being disappointed, instead of humbly repeating *mea culpa*, tax the Masters with selfishness and injustice. They will deliberately break the thread of connection ten times in one year, and yet expect each time to be taken back on the old lines! I know of one theosophist — let him be nameless though it is hoped he will recognize himself — a quiet, intelligent young

gentleman, a mystic by nature, who, in his ill-advised enthusiasm and impatience, changed *Masters* and his ideas about half a dozen times in less than three years. First he offered himself, was accepted on probation and took the vow of chelaship; about a year later, he suddenly got the idea of getting married, though he had several proofs of the corporeal presence of his Master, and had several favours bestowed upon him. Projects of marriage failing, he sought “Masters” under other climes, and became an enthusiastic Rosicrucian; then he returned to theosophy as a Christian mystic; then again sought to enliven his austerities with a wife; then gave up the idea and turned a spiritualist. And now having applied once more “to be taken back as a chela” (I have his letter) and his Master remaining silent — he renounced him altogether, to seek in the words of the above manifesto — his old “Essenian Master and to test the spirits in his name.”

The able and respected editor of the *Occult Word* and her Secretary are right, and have chosen the only true path in which with a very small dose of blind faith, they are sure to encounter no deceptions or disappointments. “It is pleasant to some of us,” they say, “to obey the call of the ‘Man of Sorrows’ who will not turn any away because they are unworthy or have not scored up a certain percentage of personal merit.” How *do* they know? Unless they accept the cynically awful and pernicious dogma of the Protestant Church, that teaches the forgiveness of the blackest crime, provided the murderer *believes sincerely* that the blood of his “Redeemer” has saved him at the last hour — what is it but *blind* unphilosophical faith? Emotionalism is *not* philosophy; and Buddha devoted his long self-sacrificing life to tear people away precisely from that evil breeding superstition. Why speak of Buddha then, in the same breath? The doctrine of salvation by *personal* merit, and *self*-forgetfulness is the corner-stone of the teaching of the Lord Buddha. Both the writers may have and very likely they did — “hunt after *strange* gods”; but these *were not our* MASTERS. They have “denied Him thrice” and now propose “with bleeding feet and prostrate spirit” to “pray that He [Jesus] may take us [them] once more under His wing,” etc. The “Nazarene Master” is sure to oblige them so far. Still they will be “living on husks” *plus* “blind faith.” But in this they are the best judges, and no one has a right to meddle with their private beliefs in our Society; and heaven grant that they should not in their fresh disappointment turn our bitterest enemies one day.

Yet, to those Theosophists, who are displeased with the Society in general, no one has ever made to you any rash promises; least of all, has either the Society or its founders ever offered their “Masters” as a *chromo-premium* to the best behaved. For years every new member has been told that *he was promised nothing*, but had everything to expect only from his own personal merit. The theosophist is left free and untrammelled in his actions. Whenever displeased — *alia tentanda via est*¹ — no harm in trying elsewhere; unless, indeed one has offered himself and is decided to win the

¹ [This is an expression often misquoted from Virgil’s *Georgics*, lib. III, 8-9:

. . . Temptanta via est, qua me quoque possim
Tollere humo victorque virum volitare per ora.

This is translated by H. Rushton Fairclough, in *Loeb Classical Series*, as:

I must essay a path whereby I, too, may rise
from earth and fly victorious on the lips of men.

— *Boris de Zirkoff*.

Masters' favours. To such especially, I now address myself and ask: Have you fulfilled *your* obligations and pledges? Have you, who would fain lay all the blame on the Society and the Masters — the latter the embodiment of charity, tolerance, justice and universal love — have you *led the life* requisite, and the conditions required from one who becomes a candidate? Let him who feels in his heart and conscience that he has — that he has never once failed seriously, never doubted his Master's wisdom, never sought *other* Master or Masters in his impatience to become an Occultist with powers; and that he has never betrayed his theosophical duty in thought or deed — let him, I say, rise and *protest*. He can do so fearlessly; there is no penalty attached to it, and he will not even receive a reproach, let alone be excluded, from the Society — the broadest and most liberal in its views, the most Catholic of all the Societies known or unknown. I am afraid my invitation will remain unanswered. During the eleven years of the existence of the Theosophical Society I have known, out of the seventy-two regularly accepted chelas on probation and the hundreds of *lay* candidates — only *three* who have not hitherto failed, and *one only* who had a full success. No one forces any one into chelaship; no promises are uttered, none except the mutual pledge between Master and the would-be-chela. Verily, verily, many are called but few are chosen — or rather few who have the patience of going to the bitter end, if bitter we can call simple perseverance and singleness of purpose. And what about the Society, in general, outside of India? Who among the many thousands of members does *lead the life*? Shall anyone say because he is a strict vegetarian — *elephants and cows are that* — or happens to lead a celibate life, after a stormy youth in the opposite direction; or because he studies the *Bhagavad-Gītā* or the “Yoga philosophy” *upside down*, that he is a theosophist *according to the Masters' hearts*? As it is not the cowl that makes the monk, so, no long hair with a poetical vacancy on the brow are sufficient to make of one a faithful follower of *divine* Wisdom. Look around you, and behold our UNIVERSAL Brotherhood so called! The Society founded to remedy the glaring evils of Christianity, to shun bigotry and intolerance, *cant* and superstition, and to cultivate real universal love extending even to the dumb brute, what has it become in Europe and America in these eleven years of trial? In one thing only we have succeeded to be considered higher than our Christian Brothers, who, according to Lawrence Oliphant's graphic expression “Kill one another for Brotherhood's sake and fight as devils for the love of God” — and this is that we have made away with *every dogma* and are now justly and wisely trying to make away with the last vestige of even nominal authority. But in every other respect we are as bad as they are: backbiting, slander, uncharitableness, criticism, incessant war-cry and ding of mutual rebukes that Christian Hell itself might be proud of! And all this, I suppose, is the Masters' fault: THEY will help those who help others on the way of salvation and liberation from selfishness — with kicks and scandals? Truly *we are* an example to the world, and fit companions for the holy ascetics of the snowy Range!

And now a few words more before I close. I will be asked: “And who are you to find fault with us? Are you, who claim nevertheless, communion with the Masters and receive daily favours from Them; Are you so holy, faultless, and so worthy?” To this I answer: I AM NOT. Imperfect and faulty is my nature; many and glaring are my shortcomings — and for this my Karma is heavier than that of any other Theosophist. *It is*

— and must be so — since for so many years I stand set in the pillory, a target for my enemies and some friends also. Yet I accept the *trial* cheerfully. Why? Because I know that I have, all my faults notwithstanding, Master’s protection extended over me. And if I have it, the reason for it is simply this: for thirty-five years and more, ever since 1851 that I saw my Master *bodily* and personally for the first time, *I have never once denied or even doubted Him*, not even in thought. Never a reproach or a murmur against Him has escaped my lips, or entered even my brain for one instant under the heaviest trials. From the first I knew what I had to expect, for I was told that, which I have never ceased repeating to others: as soon as one steps on the Path leading to the *Ashrum* of the blessed Masters — the last and only custodians of primitive Wisdom and Truth — his Karma, instead of having to be distributed throughout his long life, falls upon him in a block and crushes him with its whole weight.¹ He who believes in what he professes and in his Master, will stand it and come out of the trial victorious; he *who doubts*, the coward who fears to receive his just dues and tries to avoid justice being done — FAILS. He will not escape Karma just the same, but he will only lose that for which he has risked its untimely visits. This is why having been so constantly, so mercilessly slashed by my Karma using my enemies as unconscious weapons, that I have stood it all. I felt sure that Master would not permit that I should perish; that he would always appear at the *eleventh* hour — *and so he did*. Three times I was saved from death by Him, the last time almost against my will; when I went again into the cold, wicked world out of love for Him, who has taught me what I know and made me what I am. Therefore, I do His work and bidding, and this is what has given me the lion’s strength to support shocks — physical and mental, one of which would have killed any theosophist who would go on doubting the mighty protection. Unswerving devotion to Him who embodies the duty traced for me, and belief in the Wisdom — collectively, of that grand, mysterious, yet actual Brotherhood of holy men — is my only merit and the cause of my success in Occult philosophy. And now repeating after the Paramaguru — my Master’s MASTER — the words He had sent as a message to those who wanted to make of the Society a “miracle club” instead of a Brotherhood of Peace, Love and mutual assistance — “Perish rather, the Theosophical Society and its hapless Founders,”² I say perish their twelve years’ labour and their very lives rather than that I should see what I do to-day: the-

¹ [Cf. “Karma Nuggets” in our Secret Doctrine’s Third Proposition Series, § “Neophyte’s Karma precipitated.” — ED. PHIL.]

² [This sentence occurs in “an abridged version” of the views of the Mahā-Chohan, “to whom the future lies like an open page,” to quote the words of Master K.H. in his letter to Col. Olcott received by him November 20, 1883, while at Lahore. (See Vol. VI of the present Series, pp. 21-28, for facsimile and data.) It was Master K.H. himself who reported the views of the Mahā-Chohan either in 1880 or 1881, the first-mentioned date being given by H.P. Blavatsky in *Lucifer*, Vol. II, August 1888, p. 431, and the second date being favoured by C. Jinarājadāsa in his editorial comments thereon. The original of this important letter is not extant any longer. The text of it, as far as is known from a copy which was with C.W. Leadbeater, has been published in the *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, First Series, pp. 3-11 (Transcribed and compiled by C. Jinarājadāsa; 4th ed., 1948). H.P. Blavatsky herself quoted rather copious excerpts from it towards the end of her article, “The Theosophical Society: Its Mission and its Future” (*Lucifer*, Vol. II, August 1888, pp. 421-33), with but slight alterations of wording here and there. The complete sentence referred to in the text above runs thus:

. . . Rather perish the T.S. with both its hapless founders than that we should permit it to become no better than an academy of magic, a hall of occultism. That we — the devoted followers of the spirit incarnate of absolute self-sacrifice, of philanthropy, divine kindness, as of all the highest virtues attainable on this earth of sorrow, the man of men, Gautama Buddha — should ever allow the T.S. to represent the *embodiment of selfishness*, the refuge of the few with no thought in them for the many, is a strange idea, my brothers. . . .

— Boris de Zirkoff.]

osophists, outvying political “rings” in their search for personal power and authority; theosophists slandering and criticizing each other as two rival Christian sects might do; finally theosophists refusing to *lead the life* and then criticizing and throwing slurs on the grandest and noblest of men, because tied by their wise laws — hoary with age and based on an experience of human nature millenniums old — those Masters refuse to interfere with Karma and to play second fiddle to every theosophist who calls upon Them and whether he deserves it or not.

Unless radical reforms in our American and European Societies are speedily resorted to — I fear that before long there will remain but one centre of Theosophical Societies and Theosophy in the whole world — namely, in India; on that country I call all the blessings of my heart. All my love and aspirations belong to my beloved brothers, the sons of old Āryāvarta — the Mother-land of my MASTER.

H.P. BLAVATSKY



Can the Mahatmas be selfish?

True knowledge consists in getting at the root of all phenomena, and thus arriving at a correct understanding of the primal cause, the “rootless root,” which is not an effect in its turn but THAT, the ever incomprehensible Causeless Cause (Be-ness) of both spirit and matter, and the oldest dogma in Occultism.

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In the various writings on occult subjects, it has been stated that *unselfishness* is a *sine qua non* for success in occultism. Or a more correct form of putting it, would be that the development of an unselfish feeling is in itself the primary training which brings with it “knowledge which is power” as a necessary accessory. It is not, therefore, “knowledge,” as ordinarily understood, that the occultist works for, but it comes to him as a matter of course, in consequence of his having removed the veil which screens true knowledge from his view. The basis of knowledge exists everywhere, since the phenomenal world furnishes or rather abounds with facts, the causes of which have to be discovered. We can see only the *effects* in the *phenomenal* world, for each cause in that world is itself the *effect* of some other cause, and so on; and therefore, true knowledge consists in getting at the root of all phenomena, and thus arriving at a correct understanding of the *primal* cause, the “rootless root,” which is not an effect in its turn. To perceive anything correctly, one can use only those senses or instruments which correspond to the nature of that object. Hence, to comprehend the noumenal, a noumenal sense is a pre-requisite; while the transient phenomena can be perceived by senses corresponding to the nature of those phenomena. Occult Philosophy teaches us that the seventh principle is the only eternal Reality, while the rest, belonging as they do to the “world of forms” which are non-permanent, are illusive in the sense that they are transient. To these is limited the phenomenal world which can be taken cognisance of by the senses corresponding to the nature of those six principles. It will thus be clear that it is only the *seventh* sense, which pertains to the *noumenal* world, that can comprehend the Abstract Reality underlying all phenomena. As this seventh principle is all-pervading, it exists potentially in all of us; and he, who would arrive at true knowledge, has to develop that sense in him, or rather he must remove those veils which obscure its manifestation. All sense of *personality* is limited only to these lower six principles, for the former relates only to the “world of forms.” Consequently, *true* “knowledge” can be obtained only by tearing away all the curtains of *Māyā* raised by a sense of *personality* before the *impersonal Ātma*. It is only in that *personality* that is centred selfishness, or rather the latter creates the former and *vice versa*, since they mutually act and react upon each other. For, selfishness is that feeling which seeks after the aggrandisement of one’s own egotistic personality to the exclusion of others. If, therefore, selfishness limits one to narrow personalities, absolute knowledge is impossible so long as selfishness is not got rid of. So long, however, as we are in this world of phenomena, we cannot be *entirely* rid of a sense of personality, however exalted that feeling may be in the sense that no feeling of *personal* aggrandisement or ambition remains. We are, by our constitution and state of evolution, placed in the “World of Relativity,” but as we find that *impersonality* and non-duality is the ultimate end of

cosmic evolution, we have to endeavour to work along with Nature, and not place ourselves in opposition to its inherent impulse which must ultimately assert itself. To oppose it, must necessitate suffering, since a weaker force, in its egotism, tries to array itself against the *universal* law. All that the occultist does, is to *hasten* this process, by allowing his Will to act in unison with the Cosmic Will or the Demiurgic Mind, which can be done by successfully checking the vain attempt of *personality* to assert itself in opposition to the former. And since the MAHATMA is but an advanced occultist, who has so far controlled his lower “self” as to hold it more or less in complete subjection to the Cosmic impulse, it is in the nature of things impossible for him to act in any other but an unselfish manner. No sooner does he allow the “personal Self” to assert itself, than he ceases to be a MAHATMA. Those, therefore, who being still entangled in the web of the delusive sense of personality charge the MAHATMAS with “selfishness” in withholding “knowledge” — do not consider what they are talking about. The Law of Cosmic evolution is ever operating to achieve its purpose of ultimate unity and to carry the phenomenal into the *noumenal* plane, and the MAHATMAS, being *en rapport* with it, are assisting that purpose. They therefore know best what knowledge is best for mankind at a particular stage of its evolution, and none else is competent to judge of that matter, since they alone have got to the *basic knowledge* which can determine the right course and exercise proper discrimination. And for us who are yet struggling in the mire of the illusive senses to dictate what knowledge MAHATMAS shall impart to us and how they shall act, is like a street-boy presuming to teach science to Prof. Huxley or politics to Mr. Gladstone. For, it will be evident that, as soon as the least feeling of selfishness tries to assert itself, the vision of the spiritual sense, which is the only perception of the MAHATMA, becomes clouded and he loses the “power” which *abstract* “knowledge” alone can confer. Hence, the vigilant watch of the “Will” we have constantly to exercise to prevent our lower nature from coming up to the surface, which it does in our present undeveloped state; and thus extreme activity and not passivity is the essential condition with which the student has to commence. First his activity is directed to check the opposing influence of the “lower self”; and, when that is conquered, his untrammelled Will centred in his higher (real) “self,” continues to work most efficaciously and actively in unison with the cosmic ideation in the “Divine Mind.”



Is the desire to live selfish?

The only difference between an ordinary man, who works along with Nature during the course of cosmic evolution, and an Occultist, is that the latter, by his superior knowledge, adopts such methods of training and discipline as to quicken the process of his evolution, and thus ascend in a comparatively short period of time to that apex of physical and spiritual perfection (a god on earth) towards which the ordinary man may take billions of years to reach.

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Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (IS THE DESIRE TO “LIVE” SELFISH?) VI pp. 241-48.

The passage “to Live, to *live*, TO LIVE must be his unswerving resolve,” occurring in the article “The Elixir of Life,”¹ published in the March and April [1882] Numbers of Vol. III of *The Theosophist* — is often quoted, by superficial readers unsympathetic with the Theosophical Society, as an argument that the above teaching of occultism is the most concentrated form of selfishness.² In order to determine whether the crit-

¹ [Consult “Meditation proper is Spiritual Seership,” in our Down to Earth Series. This title can be downloaded from [here](#). — ED. PHIL.]

² [This remarkable article was written by Mirza Murad Ali Beg. This was an *alias* for Godolphin Mitford, a scion of the old Hampshire family of the Mitfords. His father had served with the East India Company. He was born at Madras and was a very eccentric and peculiar character. He had dabbled in black magic with a selfish motive in view, and had thereby provoked the action of certain elemental entities which played havoc with his consciousness. He was a Mohammedan at the time he came to H.P. Blavatsky and Col. Olcott at their residence in Bombay, on January 20th, 1881. His life had been full of wild adventures. Col. Henry S. Olcott writes of him as follows (*Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. II, pp. 289-91):

. . . when we met him, [he] was in the military employ of the Maharajah of Bhaunagar as ‘Chief Cavalry Officer’ — practically a sinecure. His had been a wild, adventurous life, more full of misery than the opposite. He had dabbled in Black Magic, among other things, and told me that all the sufferings he had passed through within the preceding few years were directly traceable to the malign persecutions of certain evil powers which he had summoned to help him get into his power a virtuous lady whom he coveted . . . he himself fell under the power of the bad spirits whom he had not the moral strength to dominate after having accepted their compulsory service. Certainly he was a distressful person to be with. Nervous, excitable, fixed on nothing, the slave of his caprices, seeing the higher possibilities of man’s nature, yet unable to reach them, he came to us as to a refuge, and shortly after took up his residence in our house for a few weeks. A strange-looking creature for an Englishman he was. His dress was that of a Muslim throughout, save that he had his long light-brown hair tied up in a Grecian knot behind his head, like a woman. His complexion was fair and his eyes light blue. In my Diary I say that he looked more like an actor made up for a part than anything else. The writing of the *Elixir of Life* occurred some-time later, but I may as well tell the story while he is under my mind’s eye.

From the time that he came to us he seemed to be engaged in a strong mental and moral conflict within himself. He complained of being dragged hither and thither, first by good, then by bad influences. He had a fine mind, and had done a good deal of reading; he wanted to join our Society, but, as I had no confidence in his moral stamina, I refused him. H.P. Blavatsky, however, offering to become responsible for him, I relented and let her take him in. He repaid her nicely, some months later, by snatching a sword from a sepoy at Wadhwan station, and trying to kill her, crying out that she and her Mahatmas were all devils! In short, he went mad. But to return. While with us he wrote some articles which were printed in *The Theosophist*, and one evening after a talk with us, sat himself down to write on the power of the will to affect longevity. H.P. Blavatsky and I remained in the room, and when he began his writing she went and stood behind him, just as she had in New York when Harisse was making his sketch of one of the Masters, under her thought-transference. The article of Mirza Saheb attracted deserved attention on its appearance (see *The Theosophist*, Vol. III, March & April 1882, pp. 140-42, 168-71), and has ever since ranked as one of the most suggestive and valuable pamphlets in our Theosophical literature. He was doing well, and there was a good chance for him to retrieve much of his lost spirituality if he would only stop with us; but after giving his promise to do so, he obeyed an irresistible impulse and rushed back to Wadhwan and to destruction. His mind did not recover its equilibrium; he turned Roman Catholic, then recanted back into Islam, and finally died, and was buried at Junagadh, where I have seen his humble tomb. His case has always seemed to me a dreadful instance of the danger one runs in dabbling with occult science while the animal passions are rampant.

Regarding this extraordinary personage, two passages occur in H.P. Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine*. They are as follows:

ics are right or wrong, the meaning of the word “selfishness” must first be ascertained.

According to an established authority, selfishness is that “exclusive regard to one’s own interest or happiness; that supreme self-love or self-preference which leads a person to direct his purposes to the advancement of his own interest, power, or happiness, without regarding those of others.”

In short, an absolutely selfish individual is one who cares for himself and none else, or, in other words, one who is so strongly imbued with a sense of importance of his own personality that to him it is the acme of all his thoughts, desires and aspirations and beyond that all is a perfect blank. Now, can an occultist be then said to be “selfish” when he desires *to live* in the sense in which that word is used by the writer of the article on “The Elixir of Life”? It has been said over and over again that the ultimate end of every aspirant after occult knowledge is *Nirvana* or *Mukti*, when the individual, freed from all *Māyāvic Upādhi*, becomes one with *Paramātma*, or the Son identifies himself with the Father in Christian phraseology. For that purpose, every veil of illusion which creates a sense of personal isolation, a feeling of separateness from THE ALL, must be torn asunder, or, in other words, the aspirant must gradually discard all sense of selfishness with which we are all more or less affected. A study of the Law of Cosmic Evolution teaches us that the higher the evolution, the more does it tend towards Unity. In fact, Unity is the ultimate possibility of Nature, and those who through vanity and selfishness go against her purposes, cannot but incur the punishment of total annihilation. The Occultist thus recognises that unselfishness and a feeling of universal philanthropy are the inherent law of our being, and all he does is to attempt to destroy the chains of selfishness forged upon us all by *Māyā*. The struggle then between Good and Evil, God and Satan, *Suras and Asuras, Devas and Daityas*, which is mentioned in the sacred books of all the nations and races, symbolizes the battle between unselfish and the selfish impulses, which takes place in a man, who tries to follow the higher purposes of Nature, until the lower animal tendencies, created by selfishness, are completely conquered, and the enemy thoroughly routed and annihilated. It has also been often put forth in various theosophical and other occult writings that the only difference between an ordinary man who works along with Nature during the course of cosmic evolution and an occultist, is that the latter, by his superior knowledge, adopts such methods of training and discipline as will hurry on that process of evolution, and he thus reaches in a comparatively very short time that apex to ascend to which the ordinary individual may take

. . . an Englishman whose erratic genius killed him. The son of a Protestant clergyman, he became a Mahomedan, then a rabid atheist, and after meeting with a *master*, a Guru, he became a mystic; then a theosophist who doubted, despaired; threw up *white* for *black* magic, went insane and joined the Roman Church. Then again turning round, anathematized her, re-became an atheist, and died cursing humanity, knowledge, and God, in whom he had ceased to believe. Furnished with all the esoteric data to write his ‘War in Heaven,’ he made a semi-political article out of it, mixing Malthus with Satan, and Darwin with the astral light. Peace be to his — *Shell*. He is a warning to the chelas who fail. His forgotten tomb may now be seen in the Mussulman burial ground of the Junagadh, Kathiawar, in India. (Vol. II, pp. 244-45, *fn.*)

. . . he was a most extraordinary Mystic, of a great learning and remarkable intelligence. But he left the Right Path and forthwith fell under Karmic retribution . . . (Vol. II, p. 541, *fn.*)

Nevertheless, H.P. Blavatsky recommends in several places his remarkable essay on the “War in Heaven” (*The Theosophist*, Vol. III, Nos. 1-3, October, November, December, 1881, pp. 24-25, 36-38, 67-70, respectively) and quotes several passages from it in *The Secret Doctrine*. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

perhaps billions of years. In short, in a few thousand years he approaches that form of evolution which ordinary humanity will attain to perhaps in the sixth or the seventh round during the process of *Manvantara*, i.e., cyclic progression. It is evident that average man cannot become a MAHATMA in one life, or rather in one incarnation. Now those, who have studied the occult teachings concerning *Devachan* and our after-states, will remember that between two incarnations there is a considerable period of subjective existence. The greater the number of such *Devachanic* periods, the greater is the number of years over which this evolution is extended. The chief aim of the occultist is therefore to so control himself as to be able to control his future states, and thereby gradually shorten the duration of his *Devachanic* states between his two incarnations. In his progress, there comes a time when, between one physical death and his next re-birth, there is no *Devachan* but a kind of spiritual sleep, the shock of death, having, so to say, stunned him into a state of unconsciousness from which he gradually recovers to find himself reborn, to continue his purpose. The period of this sleep may vary from twenty-five to two hundred years, depending upon the degree of his advancement. But even this period may be said to be a waste of time, and hence all his exertions are directed to shorten its duration so as to gradually come to a point when the passage from one state of existence into another is almost imperceptible. This is his last incarnation, as it were, for the shock of death no more stuns him. This is the idea the writer of the article on "The Elixir of Life" means to convey, when he says:

By or about the time when the Death-limit of his race is passed, HE IS ACTUALLY DEAD, in the ordinary sense, that is to say, that he has relieved himself of all or nearly all such material particles as would have necessitated in disruption the agony of dying. He has been dying gradually during the whole period of his Initiation. The catastrophe cannot happen twice over. He has only spread over a number of years the mild process of dissolution which others endure from a brief moment to a few hours. The highest Adept is, in fact, dead to, and absolutely unconscious of, the world; — he is oblivious of its pleasures, careless of its miseries, in so far as sentimentalism goes, for the stern sense of DUTY never leaves him blind to its very existence . . .

The process of the emission and attraction of atoms, which the occultist controls, has been discussed at length in that article and in other writings. It is by these means that he gets rid gradually of all the old gross particles of his body, substituting for them finer and more ethereal ones, till at last the former *sthūla śarīra* is completely dead and disintegrated and he lives in a body entirely of his own creation, suited to his work. That body is essential for his purposes, for, as the "Elixir of Life" says:

But to do good, as in everything else, a man *must* have time and materials to work with, and this is a necessary means to the acquirement of powers by which infinitely more good can be done than without them. When these are once mastered, the opportunities to use them will arrive. . .

In another place, in giving the practical instructions for that purpose, the same article says: →

The physical man must be rendered more ethereal and sensitive; the mental man more penetrating and profound; the moral man more self-denying and philosophical.

The above important considerations are lost sight of by those who snatch away from the context the following passage in the same article:

And from this account too, it will be perceptible how foolish it is for people to ask the Theosophist “to procure for them communication with the highest Adepts.” It is with the utmost difficulty that one or two can be induced, even by the throes of a world, to injure their own progress by meddling with mundane affairs. The ordinary reader will say: “This is not *god-like*. This is the acme of selfishness” . . . But let him realise that a very high Adept, undertaking to reform the world, would necessarily have to once more submit to Incarnation. And is the result of all that has . . . gone before in that line sufficiently encouraging to prompt a renewal of the attempt?

Now, in condemning the above passage as inculcating selfishness, superficial readers and thinkers lose sight of various important considerations. In the first place, they forget the other extracts already quoted which impose *self-denial* as a necessary condition of success, and which say that, with progress, new senses and new powers are acquired with which infinitely more good can be done than without them. The more spiritual the Adept becomes, the less can he meddle with *mundane, gross* affairs and the more he has to confine himself to a spiritual work. It has been repeated, time out of number, that the work on a spiritual plane is as superior to the work on an intellectual plane as the one on the latter plane is superior to that on a physical plane. The very *high* Adepts, therefore, do help humanity, *but only spiritually*: they are constitutionally incapable of meddling with *worldly* affairs. But this applies only to very high Adepts. There are various degrees of Adeptship, and those of each degree work for humanity on the planes to which they may have risen. It is only the *chelas* that can live in the world, until they rise to a certain degree. And it is because the *Adepts do* care for the world that they make their *chelas* live in and work for it, as many of those who study the subject are aware. Each cycle produces its own occultists who will be able to work for the humanity of those times on all the different planes; but when the Adepts foresee that at a particular period the then humanity will be incapable of producing occultists for work on particular planes, for such occasions they do provide by either giving up voluntarily their further progress and waiting in those particular degrees until humanity reaches that period, or by refusing to enter into *Nirvana* and submitting to re-incarnation in time to reach those degrees when humanity will require their assistance at that stage. And although the world may not be aware of the fact, yet there are even now certain Adepts who have preferred to remain *status quo* and refuse to take the higher degrees, for the benefit of the future generations of humanity. In short, as the Adepts work harmoniously, since unity is the fundamental law of their being, they have as it were made a division of labour, according to which each works on the plane at the time allotted to him, for the spiritual elevation of us all — and the process of longevity mentioned in “The Elixir of Life” is only the means to the end which, far from being selfish, is the most unselfish purpose for which a human being can labour.

Beyond the Hall of Learning is the Great White Lodge, the magnificent hierarchy of Masters, Gurus¹ and Chelas all over the world.

Selections from Letter 13, from Z to Jasper Niemand,² pp. 43-46, in *Letters That Have Helped Me*, being a private correspondence between William Quan Judge and Julia Wharton Lewis Campbell Ver Planck, later Mrs. Archibald Keightley.³ These *Letters* were first published in *The Path*, 4th ed., in New York & London. 1891, 90pp.

A second volume of *Letters*, compiled by “Jasper Niemand” and Thomas Green, was added to the original series (subsequently known as Vol. I, or Book I) and published by the latter in Radlett, Hertfordshire, England, in 1905. Vol. II contains W.Q. Judge’s notes for “An Occult Novel,” and valuable data about his life. It has been reprinted many times, often with both series together. Our reference edition of the two-volume *Letters That Have Helped Me* is the semi-centennial edition of 21st March 1946, of The Theosophy Company, Los Angeles & New York.

Further selections from Vol. I of the *Letters* can be found in our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series, under the titles: “A worthy life is a virtuous life of noble and heroic acts” and “Real life thrills in the seven brains of the heart, not in the whims and wobbles of the mind.” — ED. PHIL.

Dear Jasper:

We now have passed from the mere usual and worldly relations of teacher and pupil to that which we will call the *Lodge*⁴ for the nonce.⁵

This Lodge is not to be taken up in the pincers of criticism and analysed or fixed. It is at once everywhere and nowhere. It contains within its boundaries all real Masters, students, guides, and Gurus, of whatever race or creed or no creed. Of it has been said:

Beyond the Hall of Learning is the Lodge. It is the whole body of Sages in all the world. It cannot be described even by those who are in it, but the student is not prohibited from imagining what it is like.

So therefore at any time any one of its real teachers or disciples will gladly help any other teacher or disciple. But we are not to conclude that, because all are trying to spread truth and to teach the world, we, who call ourselves chela-aspirants or known chelas of any certain person whom we call Guru, can place ourselves at the same moment under the *direct* tutelage of more than one Guru.

¹ [Cf. A “Chela” then, is one who has offered himself or herself as a pupil to learn practically the “hidden mysteries of Nature and the psychical powers latent in man.” The spiritual teacher to whom he proposes his candidature is called in India a *Guru*; and the real Guru is always an Adept in the Occult Science. A man of profound knowledge, exoteric and esoteric, especially the latter; and one who has brought his carnal nature under subjection of the WILL; who has developed in himself both the power (*Siddhi*) to control the forces of nature, and the capacity to probe her secrets by the help of the formerly latent but now active powers of his being — this is the real Guru. — *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (CHELAS AND LAY CHELAS) IV p. 607]

² Students should bear in mind that W.Q. Judge is signing his letters as “Z.” Julia Ver Planck is responding under the nom de plume of “Jasper Niemand.”

³ For the biographies of Dr. Archibald Keightley (1859–1930), Mrs Julia Wharton Keightley (1851–1915), and Mr. Bertram Keightley (1860–1944) consult “De Zirkoff on three Eminent Theosophists,” in our Theosophy and Theosophists Series. — ED. PHIL.]

⁴ [Cf. The word “Lodge” used by the Masons, the feeble successors of the Initiates, has its root in *loga* (*loka*, in Sanskrit), a locality and a *world*; and in the Greek *logos*, the Word, a discourse; signifying in its full meaning “a place where certain things are discussed.” *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE ROOTS OF RITUALISM IN CHURCH AND MASONRY – XIII) XI p. 98]

⁵ [the present occasion]

Every aspirant to chelaship has a Guru, although he many not be aware of it. Guru is the chela's benefactor.

Each man who determines in himself that he will enter the Path, has a Guru. But the time between that determination and the hour when he will really know The Master may be long indeed; in some cases it is very short.

We must now occupy a moment in some consideration of divisions.

Just as the merest private in the army has a general who guides the whole but whom he cannot reach except through the others who are officers, so in this order we find divisions of Gurus as well as divisions of disciples.

There is the Great Guru, who is such to many who never know Him or see Him. Then there are others who know Him, and who are Gurus to a number of chelas, and so on until we may imagine a chela who may be a known Guru to another chela below him.

Then, again, there may be chelas who are acting as Guru — unacknowledged, because *pro tempore*¹ in function — to one or more other chelas.

Now he who makes the resolution above-mentioned, does thereby make a bond that rests in the highest Law. It is not a thing to be lightly done, because its consequences are of a serious nature. Not serious in the way of disasters or awful torments or such, but serious in respect to the clearness and brilliancy of those rays of Truth which we wish to reach us.

If we have revered our teacher, we will now revere our unknown Guru. We must place our hand in his hand with all love, and trust, and confidence, for it is to mighty Karma we have appealed, and the Guru is an agent of Karma.

We have thereby in a sense — its degree determined by the sincerity and power of our motive — taken ourselves out of the common, vast, moving herd of men who are living — as to this — like dumb animals, and have knocked at a door. If we have revered our teacher we will now revere our unknown Guru. We must stand interiorly in a faithful attitude. We must have an abiding, settled faith that nothing may shake. For it is to mighty Karma we have appealed, and as the Guru *is Karma* in the sense that He never acts against Karma, we must not lose faith for an instant. For it is this faith that clears up the air there, and that enables us to get help from all quarters.

Then perhaps this determinant or postulant or neophyte decides for himself that he will for the time take as teacher or guide some other chela whose teachings commend themselves. It is not necessary that any out-spoken words should pass between these two.

¹ [for the time being]

But having done this, even in thought, he should then apply himself diligently *to the doctrine of that teacher*, not changing until he really finds he has another teacher or has gone to another class. For if he takes up one merely to dispute and disagree — whether outwardly or mentally, he is thereby in danger of totally obscuring his own mind.

If he finds himself not clearly understanding, then he should with faith try to understand, for if he by love and faith vibrates into the higher meaning of his teacher, his mind is thereby raised, and thus greater progress is gained.

We now come to the possible case of an aspirant of that royal and kingly faith who in some way has really found a person who has advanced far upon *the Path*. To this person he has applied and said:

May I be accepted, and may I be a chela of either thee or some other?

That person applied to then perhaps says: “Not to me; but I refer you to some other of the same class as yourself, and give you to him to be his chela: serve him.” With this the aspirant goes, say to the one designated, and deliberately both agree to it.

Here is a case where the real Master has recommended the aspirant to a co-worker who perchance is some grade higher than our neophyte, and the latter is now in a different position from the many others who are silently striving and working, and learning from any and all teachers, but having no specialized Guru for themselves. This neophyte and his “little guru” are connected by a clear and sacred bond, or else both are mere lying children, playing and unworthy of attention. If the “little guru” is true to his trust, he occupies his mind and heart with it, and is to consider that the chela represents Humanity to him for the time.

The faith and love between Guru and chela act as a stimulus to both, and as a purifier to the mind of the chela.

We postulated that this “little guru” was in advance of the chela. It must then happen that he says that which is sometimes not clear to his chela. This will all the more be so if his chela is new to the matter. But the chela has deliberately taken that guru, and must try to understand *the doctrine of that teacher*.

The business of the Guru is to keep adjusting the chela’s progress, and not to submerge him with knowledge, or push him forward.

The proper function of the Guru is to readjust, and not to pour in vast masses of knowledge expressed in clear and easily comprehended terms. The latter would be a piece of nonsense, however agreeable, and not any whit above what any well-written book would do for its reader.

The faith and love which exist between them act as a stimulus to both, and as a purifier to the mind of the chela.

But if the chela, after a while, meets another person who seems to know as much as his “little guru,” and to express it in very easy terms, and the chela determines to take him as a teacher, he commits an error. He may listen to his teaching and admire and profit by it, but the moment he mentally determines and then in words

asks the other to be his teacher, he begins to rupture the bond that was just established, and possibly may lose altogether the benefit of both. Not necessarily, however; but certainly, if he acquaints not his “little guru” with the fact of the new adoption of teacher, there will be much confusion in that realm of being wherein both do their real “work”; and when he does acquaint his “little guru” with the fact of the newly-acquired teacher, that older guru will retire.

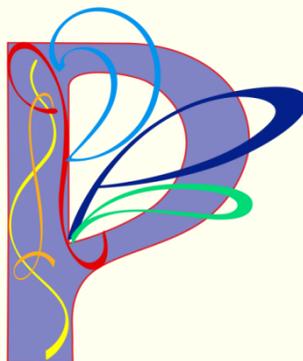
The Guru-chela affinity is sacred and precious, not lightly taken up or lightly dropped.

None of this is meant for those minds which do not regard these matters as sacred. A Guru is a sacred being in that sense. Not, of course, in a general sense — yet even if so regarded *when worthy* it is better for the chela — but in all that pertains to the spiritual and real life. To the high-strung soul this is a matter of *adoption*; a most sacred and valuable thing, not lightly taken up or lightly dropped. For the Guru becomes for the time the spiritual *Father* of the chela; that one who is destined to bring him into life or to pass him on to Him who will do so.

So as the Guru is the *adjuster* in reality, the chela does not — except where the Guru is known to be a great Sage or where the chela does it by nature — give slavish attention to every word. He hears the word and endeavours to assimilate the meaning underneath; and if he cannot understand he lays it aside for a better time, while he presently endeavours to understand what he can. And if even — as is often so in India — he cannot understand at all, he is satisfied to be near the Guru and do what may properly be done for him; for even then his abiding faith will eventually clear his mind, of which there are many examples, and regarding which how appropriate is the line:

They also serve who only stand and wait.

— Z.



Suggested reading for students.



From our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series.

- A WORTHY LIFE IS A VIRTUOUS LIFE
- ANGELS WEEP AT THE SIGHT OF HUMAN SORROW
- CHELASHIP RULES FROM THE KIU-TE
- COMMENTARY ON THE GAYATRI BY JUDGE
- DISCHARGING THE DUTY OF ANOTHER IS DANGEROUS
- DIVINE VS. WORLDLY LOVE
- EYE VS. HEART DOCTRINE
- HARMONY IS THE ONE LAW IN NATURE
- HEART DOCTRINE AND HIGHER ETHICS
- KRISHNA IN PARADISE
- LIGHT ON THE PATH
- LOVE IS THE HEALING POWER OF THE SUCCESSFUL PHYSICIAN
- MAHATMAS AND CHELAS
- NARADA BHAKTI SUTRA
- PROCLUS ON THE TEACHER-DISCIPLE BOND OF LOVE
- PROTREPTICS TO DEVOTIONAL LOVE IN IN THE BHAGAVAD GITA
- REAL LIFE THRILLS IN THE SEVEN BRAINS OF THE HEART
- SEPTUAGINT'S SONG OF SONGS - TR. BRENTON
- STAND READY TO ABANDON ALL YOU HAVE LEARNED WITH THE HEAD
- THAT PURE DESIRE, OF WHOM LOVE IS BORN
- THE BHAGAVAD GITA - SEVEN ESSAYS BY JUDGE
- THE BHAGAVAD GITA - TR. JUDGE
- THE DEVOTIONAL SONGS OF KABIR SAHEB
- THE LEGEND OF THE BLUE LOTUS
- THE PATH, BY REGINALD WILLOUGHBY MACHELL
- THE PERENNIAL WISDOM OF JAVIDAN KHIRAD

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- THE TRANS-HIMALAYAN MAHATMAS ARE MEN LIVING ON EARTH
- THE VERY BEST OF ALL TALISMANS
- THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE - SEVEN MYSTIC SOUNDS
- THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE - TR. BLAVATSKY
- THEOLOGIA GERMANICA - TR. WINKWORTH
- THEOSOPHICAL JEWELS - THE AMARANTHINE DREAM
- TOWARD THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN
- TRUE PRAYER IS MENTAL UTTERANCE IN SECRET
- WARNINGS TO WOULD-BE OCCULTISTS
- WHEN THE SUN MOVES NORTHWARD

