

The Mystique of the Masters

Fiona Odgren

Introduction

In the Ageless Wisdom the concept of Masters, or of a group of advanced souls watching over the spiritual evolution of humanity, is a very significant one which has captured the imagination and inspiration of aspiring seekers past and present, East and West. This idea, though, has been at times the victim of serious misconceptions, misunderstandings, and misplaced idolatry.

It was the enigmatic and intrepid Russian, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, founder of the modern theosophical movement, who was the first to speak openly about spiritual Mahatmas, whom she called “Masters.” Not only did she have direct communication and experience of certain Adepts, but she also affirmed that the movement she spear-headed was, in essence, the progeny and project of two Masters, in particular, Koot Hoomi and Morya.

During the years 1880 to 1885, these Masters agreed to conduct correspondence with two British theosophists living in India: Alfred Percy Sinnett, editor of *The Pioneer*, an Anglo-Indian newspaper, and Allan Octavian Hume, an eminent government official. These remarkable letters, which became known as *The Mahatma Letters*,¹ not only provided teachings unprecedented in the West, but they also depicted intimate and fascinating glimpses into the behavior, thoughts, and lives of these Masters.

Who are the Masters?

First, it is appropriate to provide more background on the two Masters involved in the correspondence. They were members of the Himalayan Brotherhood and were known as Koot Hoomi or K.H., and Morya or simply M. The Himalayan Brotherhood refers to several of the Masters existing in physical bodies in the Himalayan Mountains in a remote area.

However, a greater number are dwelling in different places in the various nations, unrecognized and unknown yet acting as focal points for the distribution of love and wisdom. The precise location of Koot Hoomi and Morya was not known but there are several references to the Tibetan town of Shigatse, with its renowned monastery connected to the Panchen Lama, and also to areas in Ladakh (“Little Tibet”), which is now under the jurisdiction of India.

It needs to be emphasized they were full-bodied men in physical form and not some kind of ethereal entities dreamed up by Blavatsky. Koot Hoomi was a Kashmiri Brahmin by birth, but his family came from Northern India. At the time of the letters, both he and Morya had strong ties to the esoteric Gelugpa division of Tibetan Buddhism and described themselves as “Buddhists.” Koot Hoomi had been educated at several European Universities and was fluent in both English and French. On occasion, Morya would speak of him as “my Frenchified K.H.” Koot Hoomi was actually his Tibetan mystical name and the name that he allowed to be used by Blavatsky and chelas (disciples), his real name never being divulged.

Morya was Blavatsky's personal spiritual teacher whom she had met numerous times in her life. She recalled having visions of him

About the Author

Fiona Odgren is currently President of The Theosophical Society, Victoria, BC, Canada. Originally from southern England, her career in the fields of music and special education has proved invaluable in her work of developing public programs on the Ageless Wisdom in Canada, which has spanned three decades. For 16 years she edited a modest theosophical magazine entitled *Pathways*. Her first book *Insights From the Masters - A Compilation* will be released this Summer in the U.K. Odgren can be reached at: <http://www.thewisets.com/>.

when she was a child, and he had saved her from fatality on more than one occasion. They met for the first time in London, in 1851, when he was part of an entourage invited to have an audience with Queen Victoria. He was a Rajput prince by birth and was described by Blavatsky as being “one of the old warrior race of the Indian desert.” He was exceptionally tall (six feet eight inches) and splendidly built—a superb type of manly beauty. Koot Hoomi referred to him sometimes as “his bulky brother.” He was not highly proficient in the English language and spoke of himself as “using words and phrases lying idly in my friend’s brain,” meaning of course the brain of K.H.

It is obvious from the Letters that, both Masters worked closely together and though of differing temperaments, totally supported one another. The genuine affection and admiration for each other is poignantly displayed. There is, for instance, the time when the Master Koot Hoomi has to experience a long retreat of several months and requests his spiritual brother, Morya, to watch over his work and continue the correspondence with Sinnett and Hume.

Morya comments “what is there I would not have promised him at that hour” and proceeds to describe the remote Himalayan area and the tower where Koot Hoomi will be enduring a period of special inner training.² The correspondents discover Morya tends to be more strict and blunt than his spiritual brother and yet Koot Hoomi later re-assures them though they will hardly be ever able to appreciate such characters as Morya’s, he is “a man as stern for himself, as for his own shortcomings, as he is indulgent for the defects of other people, not *in words* but in the innermost feelings of his heart. For while ever ready to tell you to your face anything he may think of you, he yet was ever a stauncher friend to you than myself, who may often hesitate to hurt anyone’s feelings, even in speaking the strictest truth.”³

The idea of Mahatmas, or Masters, reaches back into the night of time and propels one into the future. The spiritual works of both Blavatsky and Alice A. Bailey suggest that for millions of years (to be more specific—approximately 18 million years ago during the early to mid-third Root Race) highly evolved

beings have existed on this planet trying to guide the consciousness of infant humanity. In the mid-Lemurian times, a great Being referred to in Helena Petrovna Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine*⁴ as *The Ancient of Days*, and in the Alice A. Bailey books as *Sanat Kumara*, came with a group of other highly evolved Entities. They came to assist the Divine Plan for the unfoldment of consciousness in all life, including humanity. Gradually as members of the human race qualified, the positions of these Entities were filled, allowing them to further their own evolution. In the East the Masters are called Rishis and were those who inspired some of the earliest sacred texts such as *The Vedas and The Puranas*, of India, the Chinese *Book of Shu-King*,⁵ *The Stanzas of Dzyan*, and the *Kanjur and Tanjur*⁶ texts of Tibet.

The word “Mahatma” is of course a Sanskrit term and means literally “Great Soul” (maha - great; atman - soul). The term “Master” which was later adopted in the West for “Mahatma” is in fact, rather appropriate and descriptive, for a Master is one who has relatively mastered and overcome most aspects of life as a human being: the physical, emotional and (lower) mental. According to the later spiritual works of the Master Djwhal Khul in collaboration with Alice A. Bailey, a Master is one who has undergone the so-called fifth initiation which means he/she has undergone an expansion of consciousness permitting entrance into the “fifth Kingdom of nature,”⁷ the spiritual Kingdom, also known as the Kingdom of Souls.

There is a most apt description by the Master Koot Hoomi with regard to Masterhood to be found in *The Mahatma Letters* as follows: “A Master is the rare efflorescence of a generation of enquirers;”⁸ in other words, a Master represents the full flowering and blossoming of human evolution following eons of lives of earnest questing for truth. Undoubtedly, those lives have involved the overcoming of tremendous odds and conflicts as well as considerable sacrifice and selfless service. The Master also adds these telling words: “And to become one, he must obey the inward impulse of the soul, irrespective of the prudential considerations of worldly science and sagacity.”⁹

Such a spiritual achiever has succeeded in entering into a greater measure of the radiance of his/her inner divinity and experienced a realm of consciousness superseding the human. It then behooves the Master, unless he/she chooses to enter the bliss of Nirvana, to act as an Elder brother or sister to humanity and as a transmitter of light to those who are struggling on the lesser rungs of spiritual evolution. Having said that, though, it needs to be clarified that many Masters and Chohans (sixth degree initiates), after serving on this planet in various capacities, may pass out of our planetary life altogether and work elsewhere with the Law of Evolution.¹⁰

The Powers and Siddhis of the Masters

Eminent American Theosophist and author, G. de Purucker, points out “Masters are highly evolved men (and women) controlling powers over nature’s forces which they have gained through self-directed evolution during lives in the near and distant past. Now they have become Masters of life; in former lives they were men and women like you and me.”¹¹ G. de Purucker is saying they have the ability to control the powers of nature, as indeed Jesus demonstrated in his many miracles. Some may regard these as superhuman powers but the Masters make it quite clear such powers are the natural unfoldment of spiritual growth; furthermore, they are only used by the Masters in a selfless way—to benefit humanity—and certainly not for any purposes of personal aggrandizement.

Further reflections and clarifications with regard to “the powers of Masters” are appropriate here. What indeed do we mean by these powers or *siddhis* as they are called in the East? Undoubtedly, they refer to higher psychic abilities such as clairvoyance, clairaudience, precognition, as well as the ability to bring about magnetic healings, to read the Akashic Records, and materialize objects. These have been manifested abundantly by advanced adepts, yogis, prophets, and avatars, from time immemorial.

However, much more important than the phenomenal *siddhis* mentioned above, is the full

flowering of those “powers” which form the acme of virtues which Blavatsky referred to as *paramitas* in *The Voice of the Silence*.¹² These include all-embracing, immortal, unconditional love (*dana*) and true compassion, harmony in word and act (*shila*), patience sweet that “nought can ruffle” (*kshanti*) indifference to pleasure and pain (*virag*), courage and dauntless energy (*virya*), meditation (*dhyana* – “the golden gate leading to the realm of Sat eternal”), and wisdom (*prajna* – “the key to which makes man a god”).¹³

In *The Mahatma Letters*, yet another all-important point is raised with regard to Masters exercising their powers. The Master Koot Hoomi clarifies, “as no athlete is likely to be always amusing himself at swelling his veins in anticipation of having to lift a weight, so no adept can be supposed to keep his will in constant tension and the inner in full function when there is no immediate necessity for it. When the inner man rests, the adept becomes an ordinary man, limited to the physical senses and the functions of his physical brain.... The inner adept is ever ready, ever on the alert and that suffices for our purposes.”¹⁴

The Humanity and Humor of the Masters

It is natural to feel a sense of awe when contemplating the Masters. However, it is not advisable to worship them and this becomes plain from the vignettes depicted in the letters. One in particular depicts Blavatsky demonstrating excessive devotion to her Master. She had not seen her Master (Morya) for some months and was overcome with enthusiasm. On seeing him come towards her mounted on his steed, she ran forward throwing herself prostrate against his riding mantle much to his surprise. He was thrown off balance by such a demonstration of human devotion and had to use his power “to plunge her into a profound sleep, otherwise she would have burst some blood-vessel including kidneys, liver and her ‘interiors’ ... in her delirious attempts to flatten her nose against his riding mantle besmeared with the Sikkim mud!”¹⁵

As the Master Koot Hoomi expresses it in the Letters: “We are not gods.” Compared to aver-

age mortals, they are indeed wise, but we need to remember, they too are not “perfection writ large” and still retain certain very human qualities while working toward greater inclusiveness and fuller realization of the divine.¹⁶

In yet another letter, the same Master comments rather humorously: “we are far from being the heartless, morally dried up mummies some would fancy us to be. ‘Mejnour’ (the adept hero of Bulwer Lytton’s occult novel, *Zanoni*) is very well where he is—as an ideal character of a thrilling—in many respects truthful story. Yet believe me, few of us would care to play the part in life of a desiccated pansy between the leaves of solemn poetry.”¹⁷

He then continues in a similar vein: “We may not be quite the ‘boys’—to quote Olcott’s irreverent expression when speaking of us—yet none of our degree are like the stern hero of Bulwer’s romance. While the facilities of observation secured to some of us by our condition certainly give a greater breadth of view, a more pronounced and impartial, as a more widely humaneness ... we might justly maintain that it is the business of ‘magic’ to humanize our natures with compassion for the whole mankind as all living beings, instead of concentrating and limiting our affection to one predilected race—yet few of us (except such as have attained the final negation of Moksha) can so far enfranchise ourselves from the influence of our earthly connection as to be unsusceptible in various degrees to the higher pleasures, emotions, and interests of the common run of humanity.”¹⁸

Blavatsky, who had numerous genuine experiences of her Master not only in India and Tibet, but also in Europe and England, simply described the Masters in a letter to a friend in July 1890 as “Living men, not spirits.... Their

knowledge and learning are immense and their present holiness of life is still greater. Still they are mortal men....”

Interestingly, Annie Besant, who later became president of *The International Theosophical Society*, also had direct experiences of the Masters, including one that involved the Adept Jesus. He left in her possession a locket on a

gold chain with a two-inch oval picture of himself in it. At the time, she was rather anti-Christian as a result of abusive treatment by the Catholic nuns of her childhood schooling. The Master advised her to wear the locket; soon after this event, around 1901, she felt compelled and inspired to write the book, *Esoteric Christianity*.¹⁹

Despite the misguided efforts of some academicians to try to prove

otherwise, there is well-documented evidence demonstrating that a number of individuals in the pioneer days of The Theosophical Society, apart from Blavatsky, had first-hand experiences of the Masters. In his book, *The Mahatmas and Their Letters*,²⁰ British theosophist, Geoffrey Barboraka reports no less than 25 persons having genuine meetings.

There is the bona fide story of Henry Steel Olcott, co-founder of The Theosophical Society with Blavatsky and William Q. Judge, experiencing the real appearance of his Master, K.H., while traveling, giving talks, and meeting with potential theosophists close to the city of Lahore, now in Pakistan.²¹

It occurred during the month of November 1883. The colonel was sleeping in his tent on the night of the 19th when he felt a hand laid on him. His first instinct was to protect himself, and so he clutched “the stranger” and asked him in Hindustani who he was and what he wanted. But in the next moment a kind

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voice said, “Do you not know me? Do you not remember me?” It was the voice of the Master Koot Hoomi. Olcott comments that he wanted to jump out of bed to show his respect. However, the hand and voice restrained him from doing so.

The Master stood quietly beside his bed for a time, from which, he, Olcott, could see the divinely, benign face by the light of the lamp. Then Olcott felt some soft substance forming in his left hand and realized there was a folded paper enwrapped in a silken cloth. He found it to be a long letter of “private counsel” which referred to Olcott’s affiliation with the Brotherhood in America and other matters.

The Physical Presence of the Masters

A question and subject that causes a great deal of confusion with regard to the Masters is: *Do they really exist in the physical and can they extend the life of their physical bodies?*

When a Master chooses to stay close to humanity, he/she can employ certain powers to continue in the same physical vehicle in which he/she achieved Masterhood (the fifth initiation). In some cases, this may involve prolonging the life of the physical body for a considerable period of time in order to fulfill spiritual work. Incarnating into a new body through the normal means of birth is also an option. Some, however, may also choose to operate entirely in an etheric rather than a dense physical. It is obvious, though, from all the documented experiences that both the Masters Koot Hoomi and Morya were existing and functioning fully in physical bodies during the early days of the theosophical movement. Blavatsky made an interesting comment that since seeing her Teacher in visions from childhood and then meeting him later in the solid flesh in England and India, he looked the same. His appearance never changed when she saw him in her early twenties and also in her fifties.

It can be added many students of Theosophy and the Ageless Wisdom today cherish the idea the Masters involved with *The Mahatma Letters* are still existing and assisting humanity in

one way or another. In the book *Initiation Human and Solar*, written in 1922 by Djwhal Khul with Alice A. Bailey as his amanuensis, it is strongly affirmed these Mahatmas were still existing at that time in the same physical bodies and continuing their missions of promoting greater brotherhood and universal thought. Furthermore, Djwhal Khul mentions that the Master Koot Hoomi is concerned with vitalizing certain of the great philosophies and has a special interest in the philanthropic agencies of the world. His work with the Himalayan Brotherhood is particularly devoted to the stimulation and awakening of love-wisdom in the consciousness of humanity. The Master Morya, on the other hand, is involved in providing inspiration to various esoteric groups and the political climate of the world.²²

It is interesting also to note that the Tibetan Master, Djwhal Khul was, in fact, a trusted chela of the Master Koot Hoomi at the time of *The Mahatma Letters*. He is sometimes referred to humorously by two nicknames: “The Disinherited One” and also “Benjamin” and there are numerous references to him and the spiritual training he was undergoing at the time. There is even more than one letter penned by him on behalf of his Teacher, Koot Hoomi, notably when the latter was preparing to re-assume duties after his lengthy retreat.²³

Another question to ponder, which arises out of the last, is: *“Do the Masters use mostly an illusory densified etheric body when contacting and appearing to their disciples?”* In the East, this is referred to as a *mayavirupa*. There are certainly a number of examples of the theosophical Masters operating in this way. A well-documented account, for instance, is to be found in the book by Geoffrey Barboroka of both Blavatsky and theosophical pioneer Damodar K. Mavalankar experiencing the Master Morya projecting a densified etheric form.²⁴

Damodar describes the vivid incident in a letter to Henry Steel Olcott, which occurred in Blavatsky’s bedroom at Adyar, Madras, with both Damodar and another theosophist, Narasimhulu Chetty, in attendance. The exceptionally tall figure of Morya was seen coming in from the screen door of the bedroom, wearing a long white coat and with his long black hair flowing

over his shoulders. He moved noiselessly and soon stood opposite Blavatsky. He bent over the bed and held out his hands twice over her head. As he did so she stretched forth her hand which passed through her Teacher's—demonstrating they were seeing his *maya-virupa*, even though the impression was of a solid physical body. In this process a letter was delivered into her hand. Following this, the Master waved his hands towards them, walked a few steps inaudibly, as earlier, and then totally disappeared from the scene. The letter delivered to Blavatsky was, in fact, addressed to Damodar and was from his Teacher, the Master. Koot Hoomi “through favour of M.”

The True Identity of a Master

What we really need to ask, though, is: *What is the true identity of the Master?* Surely we are not to mistake the real Master for the outer persona, physical or otherwise. In the early days of the theosophical movement, an interesting article appeared in the magazine being produced at the theosophical headquarters in India, (Editor, H.P. Blavatsky, *The Theosophist Vol. 5, No. 3*, Adyar, Madras, 1883, 81) entitled *Mahatmas and Chelas*. Although unsigned, it is purported to be the work of the Master Koot Hoomi. It seeks to set right the misconception the Master is his appearance or persona, and clarifies the real Mahatma operates from the perspective of the higher mind and that when not operating from this elevated consciousness, he can indeed make mistakes, as intimated in some of the Mahatma Letters.

Writes the anonymous author: “When, therefore, people express a desire to ‘see a MAHATMA,’ they really do not see, or understand what it is they ask for. How can they, by their physical eyes, hope to see, or understand what it is they ask for. How can they, by their physical eyes, hope to see that which *transcends* that sight? Is it the body—a mere shell or mask—they crave or hunt after? And supposing they see the body of a MAHATMA, how can they know that behind that mask is concealed an exalted entity? Higher things can be perceived only by a sense pertaining to these higher things. And whoever therefore wants to see a real MAHATMA, must use his *intellectual* sight. He must so elevate his *Ma-*

nas that its perception will be clear and all mists created by Maya must be dispelled.” The real Mahatma or Master thus is not his physical body, but higher *Manas* or Mind, which is linked to both the Atma (Spirit) and Buddhi (Intuition and Divine Love-Wisdom). Neither is he the etheric, the emotions or everyday mind. To him these are like a piece of wearing apparel that can be put on and off at will.

The Spiritual Benefits of Studying the Masters

Finally, let us consider the question: *What are the spiritual benefits of contemplating and studying the lives of the Masters?* Surely the answer lies in the fact that members of this august body represent what we will become in the far future if our spiritual evolution proceeds along its intended course. Indeed, they provide us with a much-needed vision and model of our future.

These are highly critical times astrologically speaking, as we make the transition from the Piscean Age, which influenced the activities and development on this planet in the past two thousand years, into the Aquarian Age with its potential for greater brotherhood and altruism. The crisis and conflict between the progressive forces of Light and the retrogressive forces of Darkness are intensifying, and it is obvious the outcome is still in the balance.

However, those who are truly aspiring to the higher life and advancing in their spiritual involvement are experiencing a quickening in their growth as perhaps never experienced before in the history of the world. It is an encouraging sign more and more people are being drawn to the spiritual path and embracing the universal values and ideals espoused by the Masters, though the raging conflicts present on our globe today may indicate otherwise. The urge is on to transform and purify ourselves in order to become fitter instruments of our spiritual Souls.

By meditating on and studying the Masters and their teachings, we are opening ourselves up to and tapping into their positive, inspirational vibrations. Thus we are hastening the possibility of becoming useful mediators for helping to

anchor their ideals and plans for the future evolution of consciousness on this planet. The Masters need less advanced souls such as ourselves to act as transmitters in their great work of precipitating these ideas effectively into the public consciousness.

Rather than the celebrities we all like to honor, these Masters constitute for spiritual aspirants and seekers, the true spiritual heroes. Thoughts are energy, as we all well know, and what we concentrate on we ultimately become. Thus by focusing and reflecting on these advanced wise beings, we are helping not only ourselves to become that reality, but we are also assisting in the elevation of human consciousness, worldwide.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to answer some key questions with regard to the Masters and has tended to focus especially on those who were directly connected with the unfolding of the theosophical movement in the late nineteenth century. It has been written to invite greater interest but also to instill a more balanced and realistic view of these advanced souls, which acknowledges their humanity and humor. However, let it be clarified that since the days of H.P. Blavatsky, many exponents of the Ageless Wisdom, for example, Annie Besant, Alice A. Bailey, Nicholas and Helena Roerich, and Geoffrey Hodson, have received inspiration and direct contact not only with the Masters Koot Hoomi and Morya but also with others. A further article would be needed to address fully these later valid experiences.

Note: If you wish to have more in-depth answers to the questions posed in this article, please refer to my compilation "Insights from the Masters" due to be published and released this Summer in the United Kingdom.

¹ For online access to the Mahatma Letters, see for example:
http://blavatskyarchives.com/theosophypdfs/mahatma_letters_to_A_P_Sinnett.pdf
(last accessed March 1, 2016).

² A. Trevor Barker, *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett, Second Edition* (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press 1992), 219.

³ Ibid., *ML* 30, 233.

⁴ Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888; reprint; Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1974).

⁵ The Shû King is the most ancient of the Chinese classical books, and contains historical documents of various kinds, relating to the period from about BC 2357-627. The text is available online at:

<http://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/ancient-chinese-historical-documents-shu-king>.

⁶ *Kanjur* and *Tanjur* texts form the two parts of the Buddhist Canon. *Kanjur* is the traditional compilation of the Buddha's teaching. *Tanjur* contains commentaries and related texts by Buddhist masters.

⁷ Alice A. Bailey, *Letters on Occult Meditation* (1922; reprint; New York: Lucis Trust, 1950), 250.

⁸ A. Trevor Barker, *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett, Second Edition, ML* 2., 6.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Alice A. Bailey, *The Rays and Initiations* (1960; reprint: Lucis Trust, 1970), 142.

¹¹ G. de Purucker, *The Masters and the Path of Occultism* (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1988), 9.

¹² Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of Silence* (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1957).

¹³ Ibid., 47-48.

¹⁴ A. Trevor Barker, *The Mahatma Letters, ML* 24B, 184.

¹⁵ Ibid., *ML* 54, 314.

¹⁶ Ibid., *ML* 28, 210.

¹⁷ Ibid., *ML* 8, 32.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Annie Besant, *Esoteric Christianity* (1901; reprint; Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 2006).

²⁰ Geoffrey A. Barborka, *The Mahatmas and Their Letters* (Adyar, India: The Theosophical Publishing House, A 1973).

²¹ Ibid., 236 - 237.

²² Alice A. Bailey, *Initiation Human and Solar* (1922; reprint; New York: Lucis Trust, 1951), 55.

²³ A. Trevor Barker, *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett, ML* 125, 453 - 454.

²⁴ Geoffrey A. Barborka, *The Mahatmas and Their Letters*, 256 - 257).