

H. P. Blavatsky's Letter to the 1889 American Convention



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American Section of the Theosophical Society
Palmer House, Chicago, Illinois

Letter from H. P. Blavatsky, dated April 7, 1889.
Read by William Q. Judge, morning session, April 28, 1889.

Friends and Brother Theosophists:

You are now once again assembled in Convention, and to you again I send my heartiest greetings and wishes that the present Convention may prove a still greater success than the last.

It is now the fourteenth year since the Theosophical Society was founded by us in New York, and with steady persistence and indomitable strength the Society has continued to grow amid adverse circumstances, amid good report and evil report. And now we have entered on the last year of our second septenary period, and it is fitting and right that we should all review the position which we have assumed.

In India, under Col. Olcott's care, Branches continue to be formed, and wherever the President lectures or pays a visit, a new center of interest is sure to be created. His visits in the spirit which animates him are like a shower of rain to thirsty, sun-parched soil; flowers and herbs spring up in profusion, and the seed of healthy vegetation is sown. Now he is on a visit to Japan, whither he was invited by a strong and influential deputation to lecture on Theosophy and Buddhism, among a people who are mad and crazy to acquire Western civilization; who believe that it can only be obtained by the suicidal adoption of Christianity as a national religion. Aye! to neglect their own natural national religion in favor of a parasitic growth — and for Western civilization with its blessings such as they are!

Truly young Japan is like the conceited Greek before Troy:

“We boast ourselves to be much better men than our fathers.”

I have heard with regret that though Col. Olcott meditated a visit and a lecturing tour in America after his visit to Japan, his visit has unavoidably been prevented.

Here in England we have been hard at work; we have met some difficulties and surmounted them, but others, like the Hydra-heads of the labors of Hercules, seem to spring up at every step that is made. But a firm will and a steadfast devotion to our great Cause of Theosophy must and shall break down every obstacle until the stream of Truth shall burst its confines and sweep every difficulty away in its rolling flood. May Karma hasten the day.

But you in America. Your Karma as a nation has brought Theosophy home to you. The life of the Soul, the psychic side of nature, is open to many of you. The life of altruism is not so much a high ideal as a matter of practice. Naturally, then, Theosophy finds a home in many hearts and minds, and strikes a resounding harmony as soon as it

reaches the ears of those who are ready to listen. There, then, is part of your work: to lift high the torch of the liberty of the Soul of Truth that all may see it and benefit by its light.

Therefore it is that the Ethics of Theosophy are even more necessary to mankind than the scientific aspects of the psychic facts of nature and man.

With such favorable conditions as are present in America for Theosophy, it is only natural that its Society should increase rapidly and that Branch after Branch should arise. But while the organization for the spread of Theosophy waxes large, we must remember the necessity for consolidation. The Society must grow proportionately and not *too* rapidly, for fear lest, like some children, it should overgrow its strength and there should come a period of difficulty and danger when natural growth is arrested to prevent the sacrifice of the organism. This is a very real fact in the growth of human beings, and we must carefully watch lest the “Greater Child” — the Theosophical Society — should suffer for the same cause. Once before was growth checked in connection with the psychic phenomena, and there may yet come a time when the moral and ethical foundations of the Society may be wrecked in a similar way. What can be done to prevent such a thing is for each Fellow of the Society to make Theosophy a vital factor in their lives — to make it real, to weld its principles firmly into their lives — in short, to make it their own and treat the Theosophical Society as if it were themselves. Following closely on this is the necessity for Solidarity among the Fellows of the Society; the acquisition of such a feeling of identity with each and all of our Brothers that an attack upon one is an attack upon all. Then consolidated and welded in such a spirit of Brotherhood and Love we shall, unlike Archimedes, need neither fulcrum nor lever, but we shall move the world.

We need all our strength to meet the difficulties and dangers which surround us. We have external enemies to fight in the shape of materialism, prejudice, and obstinacy; the enemies in the shape of custom and religious forms; enemies too numerous to mention, but nearly as thick as the sand-clouds which are raised by the blasting Sirocco of the desert. Do we not need our strength against these foes? Yet, again, there are more insidious foes, who “take our name in vain,” and who make Theosophy a byword in the mouths of men and the Theosophical Society a mark at which to throw mud. They slander Theosophists and Theosophy, and convert the moral Ethics into a cloak to conceal their own selfish objects. And as if this were not sufficient, there are the worst foes of all — those of a man’s own household — Theosophists who are unfaithful both to the Society and to themselves. Thus indeed we are in the midst of foes. Before and around us is the “Valley of Death,” and we have to charge upon our enemies — right upon his guns — if we would win the day. Cavalry — men and horses — can be trained to ride almost as one man in an attack upon the terrestrial plane; shall not we fight and

win the battle of the Soul, struggling in the spirit of the Higher Self to win our divine heritage?

Let us, for a moment, glance backwards at the ground we have passed over. We have had, as said before, to hold our own against the Spiritists, in the name of Truth and Spiritual Science. Not against the students of the true psychic knowledge, nor against the enlightened Spiritualists; but against the lower order of phenomenalists — the blind worshipers of illusionary phantoms of the Dead. These we have fought for the sake of Truth, and also for that of the world which they were misleading. I repeat it again: no “fight” was ever waged against the real students of the psychic sciences. Professor Coues did much last year to make plain our real position, in his address to the Western Society for Psychic Research. He put in plain language the real importance of psychic studies, and he did excellent work in also laying stress upon the difficulties, the dangers, and, above all, the responsibilities of their pursuit. Not only is there a similarity, as he showed, between such pursuits and the manufacture of dangerous explosives — especially in unskilled hands — but the experiments, as the Professor truly said, are conducted on, with, and by a human soul. Unless prepared carefully by a long and special course of study, the experimentalist risks not only the medium’s soul but his own. The experiments made in Hypnotism and Mesmerism at the present time are experiments of unconscious, when not of conscious, Black Magic. The road is wide and broad which leads to such destruction; and it is but too easy to find; and only too many go ignorantly along it to their own destruction. But the practical cure for it lies in one thing. That is the course of study which I mentioned before. It sounds very simple, but is eminently difficult; for that cure is “*ALTRUISM.*” And this is the keynote of Theosophy and the cure for all ills; this it is which the real Founders of the Theosophical Society promote as its first object — *UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD.*

Thus even if only in name a body of Altruists, the Theosophical Society has to fight all who under its cover seek to obtain magical powers to use for their own selfish ends and to the hurt of others. Many are those who joined our Society for no other purpose than curiosity. Psychological phenomena were what they sought, and they were unwilling to yield one iota of their own pleasures and habits to obtain them. These very quickly went away empty-handed. The Theosophical Society has never been and never will be a school of promiscuous Theurgic rites. But there are dozens of small occult Societies which talk very glibly of Magic, Occultism, Rosicrucians, Adepts, etc. These profess much, even to giving the key to the Universe, but end by leading men to a blank wall instead of the “Door of the Mysteries.” These are some of our most insidious foes. Under cover of the philosophy of the Wisdom-Religion they manage to get up a mystical jargon which for the time is effective and enables them, by the aid of a very small amount of clairvoyance, to fleece the mystically inclined but ignorant aspirants to the occult, and lead them like sheep in almost any direction. Witness the now notorious H.

B. of L.,¹ and the now famous G. N. K. R.² But woe to those who try to convert a noble philosophy into a den for disgusting immorality, greediness for selfish power, and money-making under the cloak of Theosophy. Karma reaches them when least expected. But is it possible for our Society to stand by and remain respected, unless its members are prepared, at least in future, to stand like one man, and deal with such slanders upon themselves as Theosophists, and such vile caricatures of their highest ideals, as these two pretenders have made them?

But in order that we may be able to effect this working on behalf of our common cause, we have to sink all private differences. Many are the energetic members of the Theosophical Society who wish to work and work hard. But the price of their assistance is that all the work must be done in their way and not in anyone else's way. And if this is not carried out they sink back into apathy or leave the Society entirely, loudly declaring that they are the only true Theosophists. Or, if they remain, they endeavor to exalt their own method of working at the expense of all other earnest workers. This is fact, but it is not Theosophy. There can be no other end to it than that the growth of the Society will soon be split up into various sects, as many as there are leaders, and as hopelessly fatuous as the 350 odd Christian sects which exist in England alone at the present time. Is this prospect one to look forward to for the Theosophical Society? Is this "Separateness" consonant with the united Altruism of Universal Brotherhood? Is this the teaching of our Noble MASTERS? Brothers and Sisters in America, it is in your hands to decide whether it shall be realized or not. You work and work hard. But to work properly in our Great Cause it is necessary to forget all personal differences of opinion as to how the work is to be carried on. Let each of us work in his own way not endeavor to force our ideas of work upon our neighbors. Remember how the Initiate Paul warned his correspondents against the attitude of sectarianism they took up in the early Christian Church: — "I am of Paul, I of Apollos," and let us profit by the warning. Theosophy is essentially unsectarian, and work for it forms the entrance to the Inner life. But none can enter there save the man himself in the highest and truest spirit of Brotherhood, and any other attempt at entrance will either be futile or he will lie blasted at the threshold.

But Karma will reconcile all our differences of opinion. A strict account of our actual work will be taken, and the "wages" earned will be recorded to our credit. But as strict an account will be taken of the work which anyone, by indulging in personal grievances, may have hindered his neighbors from doing. Think you it is a light thing to hinder the force of the Theosophical Society, as represented in the person of any of its leaders, from doing its appointed work? So surely as there is a Karmic power behind the Society will that power exact the account for its hindrance, and he is a rash and ignorant man who opposes his puny self to it in the execution of its appointed task.

¹ Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor

² Genii of Nations, Knowledge(s), and Religion

Thus, then, “UNION IS STRENGTH”; and for every reason private differences must be sunk in united work for our Great Cause.

Now what has been our work during the past year? Here we have organized the British Section of the Theosophical Society with the help and under the orders of the President-Founder, Col. Olcott. And instead of one Lodge have been formed smaller local Branches, which, therefore, have greater powers of work and facilities of meeting. What has been done in India you will probably have already heard. And you have heard or know what has been accomplished and what increase in strength your own Section has made.

As regards our means of spreading knowledge, we have in the West “Lucifer,” the “Path” and the T. P. S. pamphlets. All these have brought us into contact with numerous persons of whose existence we should not otherwise have become aware. Thus they are all of them necessary to the Cause, as is also the attempting to influence the public mind by the aid of the general Press. I regret to say that several co-workers on “Lucifer” have now left it and the Society for precisely such personal differences as those alluded to above, and have now become antagonistic, not only to me personally, but to the system of thought which the Theosophical Society inculcates.

On account of a personal feeling against Col. Olcott, the “Lotus” — the French Journal — has also seceded from Theosophy; but we have just founded “La Revue Theosophique” to replace it in Paris. It is edited by myself and managed or directed by Countess d’ Adhemar, an American lady, loved and respected by all who know her, and a friend of our Brother, Dr. Buck.

As many of you are aware, we have formed the “Esoteric Section.” Its members are pledged, among other things, to work for Theosophy under my direction. By it, for one thing, we have endeavored to secure some solidarity in our common work: to form a strong body of resistance against attempts to injure us on the part of the outside world, against prejudice against the Theosophical Society and against me personally. By its means much may be done to nullify the damage to the work of the Society in the past and to vastly further its work in the future.

Its name, however, I would willingly change. The Boston scandals have entirely discredited the name “Esoteric”; but this is a matter for after consideration.

Thus, as I have already said, our chief enemies are public prejudice and crass obstinacy from a materialistic world; the strong “personality” of some of our own members; the falsification of our aims and name by money-loving charlatans; and, above all, the desertion of previously devoted friends who have now become our bitterest enemies.

Truly were those words wise which are attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. We sow our seed and some falls by the wayside on heedless ears; some on stony ground, where it springs up in a fit of emotional enthusiasm, and presently, having no root, it dies and “withers away.” In other cases the “thorns” and passions of a material world choke back the growth of a goodly fruitage, and it dies when opposed to the “cares of life and the deceitfulness of riches.” For, alas, it is only in a few that the Seed of Theosophy finds good ground and brings forth a hundredfold.

But our union is, and ever will be, our strength, if we preserve our ideal of Universal Brotherhood. It is the old “In hoc signo vinces” [“With this sign thou shalt conquer”] which should be our watchword, for it is under its sacred flag that we shall conquer.

And now a last and parting word. My words may and will pass and be forgotten, but certain sentences from letters written by the Masters will never pass, because they are the embodiment of the highest practical Theosophy. I must translate them for you:

“ . . . Let not the fruit of good Karma be your motive; for your Karma, good or bad, being one and the common property of all mankind, nothing good or bad can happen to you that is not shared by many others. Hence your motive, being selfish, can only generate a double effect, good and bad, and will either nullify your good action, or turn it to another man’s profit.” . . . “There is no happiness for one who is ever thinking of Self and forgetting all other Selves.”

“The Universe groans under the weight of such action (Karma), and none other than self-sacrificial Karma relieves it . . . How many of you have helped humanity to carry its smallest burden, that you should all regard yourselves as Theosophists. Oh, men of the West, who would play at being the Saviors of mankind before they even spare the life of a mosquito whose sting threatens them!, would you be partakers of Divine Wisdom or true Theosophists? Then do as the gods when incarnated do. Feel yourselves the vehicles of the whole humanity, mankind as part of yourselves, and act accordingly”

These are golden words; may you assimilate them! This is the hope of one who signs herself most sincerely the devoted sister *and servant* of every true follower of the Masters of Theosophy.

Yours fraternally,

H. P. BLAVATSKY