

H. P. BLAVATSKY, THE MYSTERY

By L. Gordon Plummer

For countless generations hath the adept builded a fane of imperishable rocks, a giant's Tower of INFINITE THOUGHT, wherein the Titan dwelt, and will yet, if need be, dwell alone, emerging from it but at the end of every cycle, to invite the elect of mankind to co-operate with him and help in his turn enlighten superstitious man. And we will go on in this periodic work of ours; we will not allow ourselves to be baffled in our philanthropic attempts until that day when the foundations of a new continent of thought are so firmly built that no amount of opposition and ignorant malice guided by the Brethren of the Shadow will be found to prevail.

But until that day of final triumph someone has to be sacrificed—though we accept but voluntary victims. The ungrateful task did lay her low and desolate in the ruins of misery, misapprehension, and isolation: but she will have her reward in the hereafter, for we never were ungrateful. As regards the Adept—not one *of my kind*, good friend, but far higher—you might have closed your book with those lines of Tennyson's "Wakeful Dreamer"—you knew him not—

How could ye know him? Ye were yet within
The narrower circle; he had well nigh reached
The last, which, with a region of white flame,
Pure without heat, into a larger air
Up-burning, and an ether of black blue
Invests and ingirds all other lives...

The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett (Letter 19, pp. 68-69)

SOMEONE said not long ago: "I wish I could have lived in HPB's time. I should like to have known her." It would certainly have been a great experience, but I could not help but wonder how many of us would have understood her. While we were not present to participate in the work as it was carried out in her time, and we missed the benefit of her "word of mouth" teaching, nevertheless, I am inclined to think that we have a certain advantage brought about by the span of years. As a recent writer pointed out, it is difficult to see the picture when you are inside the frame. Because we are now looking at the picture from a distance, we can select the facet of HPB's life that we wish to examine. A book might be written, giving an entire section to each of such aspects as her childhood, her travels, her training, her books—not to mention the

numberless articles that she wrote—and, finally, her true nature. Had we lived in her day, we would have received the full impact of this amazing person, and it might well have been a bewildering experience, as it undoubtedly was to many of her contemporaries.

In the brief space allowed in a magazine, it seems better to pass by the incidents of her life, as would be required in a biographical sketch. Instead, I will focus attention upon some of the factors in her own nature that made her what she was. This is of particular interest to her students, and might give much food for thought to all.

We must divide HPB's life into three periods. First, her childhood and early womanhood, during which she traveled widely, for she had an insatiable appetite for adventure. Her natural leanings toward the mystical and the occult led her into many by-paths that would be overlooked by the average traveler. She delved deeply into Eastern philosophy and wrote vividly of her experiences. Her first major book, *Isis Unveiled*, was to a large extent the fruit of her travels, as was *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan*. Both of these books make absorbing reading. It is a matter of historical record that the first edition of *Isis Unveiled*, comprising 1000 copies, was completely sold out in ten days! I do not know how many editions have appeared since it was first published in 1877.



The second portion of her life that must be understood, to a degree at least, comprises those years of her intensive training for the work that she was destined to do. The nature of this training is not easily understood for the reason that nothing resembling it exists in Western countries. Modern psychology is not equipped to analyze a nature such as hers, and that is why she is so misunderstood. No one can be blamed for not understanding her, although the crude attacks which have been made upon her cannot be condoned. In order to understand her at all, we must realize first of all that she lived in a "frame of reference" quite different from that of the ordinary person, and it is my purpose to give a picture, if possible, of this peculiar frame of reference. In one respect, understanding her is something like accepting some of the more recent scientific explanations of time and space; they are difficult for us to understand because they do not fall within our experience, or frame of reference. In like manner, there is much about H. P. Blavatsky that does not fall within the experience of any of us. Nevertheless, an effort to understand her has its beneficial effect, as I hope to show.

Her training was the natural outgrowth of her childhood. She was a most unusual child. Although unmanageable in her rejection of authority and her wild tempers, she nevertheless had certain characteristics that fitted her for precisely the kind of work she was to do. She was more than just a protester. Like so many of the present day, she saw through the shams and hypocrisies of life, but unlike the run-of-the-mill protester, she had something unique. She had certain qualities essential to a program being initiated by certain members of a Brotherhood of Adepts long in existence in the East but totally unknown in the West. These Brothers are known by various names in the East, such as the Mahatmas, the Masters of Wisdom, the Elder Brothers of humanity, and so on. They have worked for countless generations, as indicated in the extract from *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* quoted at the beginning of this article. Their home is in the trans-Himalayan fastnesses in Tibet. H. P. Blavatsky was trained by these Mahatmas for the work that was required. She was instructed by them to inform the West about them and their work. One very important aspect of their endeavor took the form of a correspondence carried on by them with A. P. Sinnett from 1880 to 1884. The originals of these letters are now in the British Museum¹ where arrangements may be made to examine them. They were compiled and published in 1923 by A. Trevor Barker.²

During the early years of H. P. Blavatsky's life she was mediumistically inclined and was constantly surrounded by psychic phenomena. Naturally, she became a center of interest, as well as of controversy. While The Theosophical Society of today does not encourage psychic practices and is ever ready to point out the dangers to health—physical as well as mental—incurred by anyone seeking to develop such faculties, nevertheless, the very fact that she was endowed with a strong psychical nature made her peculiarly adaptable to the type of training that was in store for her. Since it was necessary that she should give undeniable proof of the existence of nature's finer forces, she had first of all to become a complete master of the strange powers which she possessed. The first stages of her training then were in the nature of a cleansing of all of her lower psychic tendencies and substituting for them *genuine occult powers*. There is a vast difference between the two. The task was accomplished at great cost to herself. She became dangerously ill on more than one occasion, but through these crises she brought her psychic nature under complete control. Thereafter, with the help of her Teachers, she was able to perform wonders that would today strain the credulity of any but the student already versed in the esoteric philosophy.

¹ Editor—The Mahatma Letters were transferred to the British Library in London circa 2000.

² Editor—The latest edition of *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett* was published in 1998. The editor, Vic Hao Chin, Jr., arranged the letters in chronological sequence whereas earlier editions had the letters arranged by topic. In this article, any references to the letters are to the chronological edition.

It should be stated that HPB met her Teacher face to face for the first time in London on her twentieth birthday. At that time he made known to her in general outline what her destiny would be, if she was willing to accept it, and all the trials and sufferings that would necessarily accompany it. She was given a choice, and as the work involved the most genuine and soul-satisfying service to the human race, there was never any doubt in her mind. If she had been difficult to control as a child, she was now willing to undergo the most grueling training at the hands of her Teachers, for having once recognized them, her devotion to them was unswerving to the day of her death. It would have never occurred to her to rebel, no matter how difficult the discipline might be. In short, she gave herself completely to the task of fitting herself to be the transmitter of teachings that her Masters desired should be promulgated to the world.

She was very reticent about the nature of her training, but we may be sure that it had at least two aspects. One of these was in the nature of intensive study of the doctrines of Eastern religion and philosophy, and to a far greater depth than that afforded in exoteric systems of thought. Her Teachers were in possession of the esoteric philosophy, and she was taught far in excess of anything that she was permitted to reveal. This was necessary in order that she might have the necessary background from which to work. The second aspect of her training was in the nature of a transformation of her own being. And here psychology must give way to pneumatology if we are going to understand the difference between H. P. Blavatsky the woman and "HPB" the teacher. The Ancient Wisdom holds that within every human being there is a divine essence at one with, because derived from, Deity itself. Between this divine essence and the physical body there are many grades or levels of consciousness manifesting themselves in the various selves in man which have come to be known as the *seven principles*. Although each such self or principle is an entity in its own right, learning and growing, nevertheless the whole stream of consciousness that is human might be compared to the spectrum of light ranging from red to violet. Each of the seven colors is considered to have its own characteristics, yet in the spectrum the gradation is such that it is impossible to tell where one color leaves off and the next begins. The illustration of the spectrum will be used again in order to bring out a very mysterious and important fact of occult training.

However, it should be made clear at this point that the various "selves" in the human being have likewise their own characteristics. The one in which our consciousness is focused, and which therefore assumes the greatest importance, is the personality. This includes the mind, the emotions, the desires, as well as the senses which function through the appropriate organs of the physical body. Now, this personality does not stand very high in the spectrum of human nature. Some of our higher selves have long since evolved out of the mediocre state that the personality finds itself in.

One of these higher selves is the inner Guide or Teacher. It may well be that this concept has little meaning for some, but one who has learned about the existence of his inner Teacher and who strives to find it does ultimately learn how to recognize it. He discovers that the real secret of meditation is the ability to place oneself in the attitude of a learner before his mentor, and he eventually develops the ability to take knowledge, as we might express it. He finds that his own inner Teacher is a source of wisdom as well as knowledge, and he develops a relationship to it that changes his whole life.

It is only when the student has developed this faculty of recognizing their own inner Teacher that they are then able to recognize a Teacher such as those who taught HPB. Such Teachers can do nothing for anyone until they have discovered their own Teacher within, for until that occurs, the pupil has not awakened the faculty of understanding. This is nobody's fault—certainly not the Teacher's. It is just a matter of the growth of the student, and this must proceed in its own good time. Thus it is that it is difficult for the Teachers to find just the right person to undertake the particular training for the exceedingly difficult work which must be carried on toward the eventual enlightenment of the human race. That is why, in the following passage from *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* it is stated that the "Chiefs" searched fruitlessly for over a century for just the right person.

After nearly a century of fruitless search, our chiefs had to avail themselves of the only opportunity to send out a European body upon European soil to serve as a connecting link between that country and our own. You do not understand? Of course not. Please then, remember, what she tried to explain, and what you gathered tolerably well from her, namely the fact of the seven principles in the complete human being. Now, no man or woman, unless he is an initiate of the "fifth circle" can leave the precincts of *Bod-Las* and return back into the world in his integral whole—if I may use the expression. One, at least of his seven satellites has to remain behind for two reasons: the first to form the necessary connecting link, the wire of transmission—the second as the safest warranter that certain things will never be divulged.

Letter XXII, pp. 79-80

A few of the terms require explanation. *Bod-Las* is one of the names for the spiritual home of the Adepts or Masters of Wisdom. The "fifth circle" referred to is the fifth degree of Initiation, that one by which the learner moves from the state of discipleship to Adeptship. Only an Adept can leave this spiritual home and go into the world to work, retaining the full spectrum of his consciousness, for he can be relied upon to know with certainty how to work without the special type of help from his own Chiefs that the disciple needs. The latter has not yet developed to the degree that he is able to

work entirely upon his own. So, the term "one of his satellites" refers to one of his selves or principles. Which one is not indicated, and it would probably be fruitless for us to speculate upon this, for it might be that circumstances will vary with the individual so sent out to do the spiritual work of the Brotherhood.

HERE we shall return to the illustration of the spectrum. Pure white light when directed through a prism will produce a continuous spectrum. However, if the light is made to shine through some chemical vapor (for the moment, let us suppose it to be sodium vapor) a dark line will appear in the yellow portion of the spectrum. The chemist learns to identify the chemical element by the presence of well-recognized lines in the spectrum. That is the way in which the chemical elements in a distant star may be detected. What happens is that as the light passes through the vapor (sodium for the purposes of our explanation) the atoms absorb just those frequencies of light to which they are resonant. Since these frequencies have been absorbed, they are no longer present. Hence, the dark lines are really gaps in the continuous spectrum.

In the case of a Messenger of the type that HPB was, there were gaps in the continuous spectrum of her consciousness, because in the process of leaving the spiritual home in which she was trained, certain portions of herself were withheld. This is a very strange doctrine to be sure, but it is a fact that explains much about every Messenger who appears. It makes the life of the Messenger a martyrdom indeed, but it is an absolute necessity. At the conclusion of the tour of duty, all is restored to normal, and the Messenger has gained enormously in experience and knowledge. But during the lifetime of service under these peculiar circumstances, he or she works under a serious psychological handicap. In certain respects, such individuals might be said to be handicapped. This explains in part HPB's unorthodox behavior and the difficult temperament that was hers. These, of course, are the things that are seized upon by her critics, who completely overlook her intellectual and spiritual qualities which far outweighed the disadvantages under which she worked.

It may seem to the reader that the path of occultism is unnecessarily harsh. It is indeed harsh, but not unnecessarily so. There is a reason for everything connected with it. There is nothing arbitrary in the laws governing the life of the student. All are rooted in the very fabric of nature itself. It cannot be otherwise.

Why then, should such a one as H. P. Blavatsky undertake the training at all? For the same reason that it has been undertaken by thousands before her: coupled with the stern discipline and the suffering, there is also the intense joy of service, a joy that has no equal. It is a state of consciousness beside which all our notions of happiness and contentment pale into insignificance. This joy comes from a knowledge that one is privileged to bring light to a darkened world. It is the strange paradox in the nature of the Messenger that makes this joy a possibility, and for the following reason: the gaps

in the spectrum of the consciousness of the Messenger are arranged for with a certain lofty end in view. When a Messenger undertakes the training, he or she is made fully aware of this purpose, and readily assent to it, even though adequately warned of the dangers and the suffering that this will entail for the duration of their lifetime.

The service the Messenger renders takes this form: the intellectual vitality of the Teacher works through the psychological nature of the Messenger, and the entrance is made through the “gaps” that have just been described. This is the only way in which it can be done.

Now, the Teacher is not working at all times through the Messenger. When he is, then the Messenger (in this case, HPB) speaks and writes “ex cathedra” as the saying goes. It is not the Messenger speaking; it is the Teacher speaking through him.

A great portion, if not the majority, of HPB’s writings were accomplished by this form of occult dictation. Many of the Mahatma Letters were written to A. P. Sinnett in this manner, relatively few of them having been in the Mahatmas’ own handwriting. They were letters from the Mahatmas, none the less.

So here we have an important difference between a medium and a *mediator*. There are gaps in the spectrum of the consciousness of a medium, but these did not come about through training; rather they betoken an unhealthy state of the psychological apparatus of such individuals. They are often a prey to their own psychic powers, over which they have no control. Such persons are unfortunate indeed, for the reason that entities which are not welcomed by the trained student gain entrance unhindered into the nature of the medium while in the trance state, and during such times they are unaware of what they are saying or doing; thus, upon awakening, they do not remember. It is said that these destructive tendencies are almost certain to be carried over into a future life. This is one of the most important reasons why the development of psychic power is strongly discouraged by the Teachers. Only they know when the time is right. Such development—if it takes place at all—is for the purpose of making these powers the servants of vastly higher powers—the genuine spiritual powers—which are first to be awakened.

The case of the mediator is entirely different from that of the medium. During the time when he is working as the mouthpiece of his Teacher, all of his faculties are awake and alert. This activity is not accompanied by a trance condition. The mediator knows exactly what he is doing and gladly gives of himself so that he can transmit the message that the Teacher wishes to promulgate. Thus we see that the word “mediator” is synonymous with messenger.

The ability to perform this work is what makes all of the suffering and misunderstanding worth while. No better words could convey the spirit of HPB's work than those which appeared in her magazine *Lucifer* for September, 1891:

There is no danger that dauntless courage cannot conquer.

There is no trial that spotless purity cannot pass through.

There is no difficulty that strong intellect cannot surmount.

For those who win onwards, there is reward past all telling,
the power to bless and save humanity.

For those who fail, there are other lives in which success may come.
