

The Universal Brotherhood of Humanity

By Edward Abdill

Originally printed in the SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2008 issue of Quest magazine.
Citation: Abdill, Edward. "The Universal Brotherhood of Humanity." Quest 96.5 (SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2008):177-179, 191.

IN HER LETTER TO THE SECOND CONVENTION of the American Section, H. P. Blavatsky wrote:

[There are those] among us who realize intuitively that the recognition of pure Theosophy—the philosophy of the rational explanation of things and not the tenets—is of the most vital importance in the Society, inasmuch as it alone can furnish the beacon-light needed to guide humanity on its true path. This should never be forgotten, nor should the following fact be overlooked. On the day when Theosophy will have accomplished its most holy and most important mission—namely, to unite firmly a body of men of all nations in brotherly love and bent on a pure altruistic work, not on a labor with selfish motives—on that day only will Theosophy become higher than any nominal brotherhood of man.



In that short paragraph, HPB summarized the principal objective of the Theosophical Society. Yet, the ideas contained in that paragraph need to be explored and meditated upon if we are to fully grasp what is meant by Theosophy and what the Theosophical Society was meant to do. We might begin our exploration by considering the evolution of the objectives (Objects) of the Society. The objectives and their changes were formulated in the nineteenth century when the term "man" referred to the species, not the male, and "brotherhood" included all human beings.

At the founding of the Theosophical Society in 1875, the objectives of the Theosophical Society were "To collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe." In 1878, the objectives were expanded, ending with "and chiefly, aid in the institution of a Brotherhood of Humanity."

In 1879, the objectives were restated to include the following points. The Theosophical Society is formed upon the basis of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity. . . . The Society's plans are declared to be as follows:

a) To keep alive in man his spiritual intuitions.

b) To oppose and counteract—after due investigation. and proof of its irrational nature—bigotry in every form.

c) To promote a feeling of brotherhood among nations.

d) To seek to obtain knowledge of all the laws of Nature and aid in diffusing it; and especially to encourage the study of those laws least understood by modern people and so termed the Occult Sciences.

e) To gather for the Society's library and put into written forms correct information on ancient philosophies, etc.

f) To promote in every practicable way non-sectarian education.

g) To encourage and assist individual Fellows in self-improvement, intellectual, moral, and spiritual.

There have been several other revisions, the latest in 1896, being the current objectives:

To form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or color.

To encourage the comparative study of religion, philosophy, and science.

To investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in humanity.

Two threads are clear throughout these objectives: (1) Universal Brotherhood, and (2) methods by which it might be realized. Paramount to such a realization is knowledge. To do the good, we must know what the good is. Hence a common emphasis throughout these objectives is to obtain knowledge and make it available to everyone. Perhaps for that reason the objectives of 1875 emphasized that we must first discover the laws that govern our universe. Clearly we are creatures within this universe and are therefore also subject to the laws that govern it. If we are to live in harmony with nature and with each other as part of nature, we must discover the laws that govern nature and ourselves. To date, humanity has learned a great deal about physical nature, but very little about inner nature. The third objective of the TS today is: "To investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in humanity." It is in those latent powers of humanity and the unexplained laws of nature that we are most likely to discover what unites us all at the very core of our being.

Since the founding of the Theosophical Society, there has been an emphasis on discovering the laws that govern our universe, especially those hidden or "occult" laws that govern our subjective nature. Psychology and sociology have made a start by seeking to discover principles that rule our mental and emotional nature. But these are soft sciences still in their infancy.

Throughout the changes of objectives, universal brotherhood has been emphasized equally with the intent to discover the laws of our universe. Is there a connection between the two, and if so, what might that connection be?

In the poem of *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky lists three fundamental propositions on which, she says, the entire Theosophical philosophy is based. The first of these reads, in part:

An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and immutable PRINCIPLE on which all speculation is impossible, since it transcends the power of human conception and can only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude. It is beyond the range and reach of thought—in the words of the Mandukya Upanishad “unthinkable and unspeakable.”

While that is theoretical, even to Blavatsky’s teachers, everything her teachers have discovered points to that unspeakable principle as the root and source of all existence.

For a universe to come into being, that boundless principle must be differentiated. We might say that eternal SPACE “crystallizes” like water into ice to become matter and form. If so, then we, and all existence, are but temporal states within an eternal reality. If true, as more and more evidence suggests, then universal brotherhood is not something that we must create; it is a fact to be realized. We are all different states of the same stuff. To use another metaphor, we are all unique and distinct waves in an eternal and indivisible sea.

The teachers of H. P. Blavatsky, known as adepts, Mahatmas, or Masters, emphasized brotherhood more than once in their letters. In Letter 12 of *The Mahatma Letters*, chronological edition, Koot Hoomi (KH) wrote: “The Chiefs want a ‘Brotherhood of Humanity,’ a real Universal Fraternity started; an institution which would make itself known throughout the world and arrest the attention of the highest minds.”

Yet, despite the emphasis on Universal Brotherhood, Theosophists have fought among themselves from the days of HPB every bit as much as other religious groups have fought among themselves since the days of their founders. Perhaps the problem lies in the definition of brotherhood.

To many, “Brotherhood” means that we should be tolerant of one another, that we should be nice to one another, that we should not say anything negative about one another. Yet in *The Mahatma Letters* and HPB’s writings, one finds sharp criticism of members and non-members, warnings about the motives of certain individuals and the danger they posed to the Society, and even biting irony to deflate a personal ego.

In reading the letters, one quickly learns that no matter how much the adepts may have approved of tolerance and civility, Universal Brotherhood meant something far more profound to them. Perhaps the following statements from the letters will help us to discover what they meant.

In Chronological Letter 5, KH wrote: “The term ‘Universal Brotherhood’ is no idle phrase. Humanity in the mass has a paramount claim upon us. . . . It is the only secure foundation for universal morality . . . and it is the aspiration of the *true adept*.” And in Chronological Letter 33, he wrote: “It is he alone who has the love of humanity at heart, who is capable of grasping thoroughly the idea of a regenerating practical Brotherhood who is entitled to the possession of our secrets. He alone . . . will never misuse his powers, as there will be no fear that he should turn them to selfish ends. A man who places not the good of mankind above his own good is not worthy of becoming our *chela* [student]—he is not worthy of becoming higher in knowledge than his neighbor.”

In the above cited passage, the adept is telling us that the love of humanity can open our eyes to the fact that all individuals are rooted in the One. Simply *believing* in universal brotherhood is not sufficient. Ultimately, the belief must give way to become an insight into its truth. When that happens, we sense the unity of all life, and from then on we are passionately dedicated to awakening that awareness in others.

The current first object of the Theosophical Society is “To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity.” But what does “*The Universal Brotherhood of Humanity*” mean?

Let’s go back to the objectives of 1879. In part they read: “To keep alive in man his spiritual intuitions.” In that phrase there may be a clue to the Universal Brotherhood to which the adepts refer.

Intuition, in the Theosophical sense, means insight and insight comes from a unifying aspect of the inner self of every human being (*buddhi*). By effort, meditation, and an altruistic way of life, we are capable of becoming one with that aspect of the inner self from which all insights derive. From that, in deep meditation, we can get a sense of what the adept calls “humanity as a whole.” When we do, even for a fleeting moment, we have become one with the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity.

The Theosophical Society was organized to form a nucleus of people who have some sense of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, a nucleus of people who sense that the Divine consciousness in them is identical to the Divine consciousness in all others. The Theosophical Society was meant to be an organization of people from every culture who have some sense of the underlying unity of all. It was meant to be an organization of people who work together to help others realize their underlying unity with humanity as a whole. Far as we may be from it, that is our ultimate goal. Why is it so difficult to achieve?

In Chronological Letter 131, the adept warns us:

Beware then, of an uncharitable spirit, for it will rise up like a hungry wolf in your path, and devour the better qualities of your nature. . . . Broaden instead of narrowing your sympathies; try to identify yourself with your fellows, rather than to contract your circle of affinity. . . . Friend, beware of pride and egoism, two of the worst snares for the feet of him who aspires to climb the high paths of knowledge and spirituality.

We so often identify as Christians, Jews, Hindus, Americans, Russians, atheists, and even Theosophists. Yet, none of those labels describes who we really are. In fact, there are only human beings. All the labels do no more than describe what we believe, how we have been conditioned, our place of birth, our preference for one religion or another or none. Many may recognize the truth of that, but few feel with every fiber of their being that they are at root one with humanity as a whole. Even those among us who respect all cultures may not sense the divine spark of life in every person we meet. We are likely to judge others by appearances. We see only a Polaroid snapshot of those we meet, and we tend to judge that person on the tiny bit of information that the photo provides. We human beings are extraordinarily complex. One moment we may appear to be saints, and in the next to be devils. It is easy to feel unity

with someone who is displaying their saintly side, but not so easy to feel it when they show their diabolical side.

The Theosophical Society is open to all who are in sympathy with its objectives. We are meant to see beyond the appearances of not only race, creed, and sex, but to see beyond the irritating faults of the people we meet, especially members of the TS Universal Brotherhood has no meaning if we only feel brotherly toward those whom we like. This is not to say that we should be sentimental and pretend that everyone is a nice person. Some people and some members are not nice. Yet, behind the surface irritants and faults lies the divine spark with which all are united.

This is not to say that we should be blind to the faults of others. That would be reading something into Brotherhood that is not there. Brotherhood is not even *personal* affection for everyone. That is impossible, even for some, if not all, of the adepts. Yet in spite of the faults we see in others, and in spite of the fact that some people try our patience, we can still see the Divine life within them and we can still work with them for the greater good.

From an awareness of underlying unity comes an altruistic way of life that is compassionate, wise, and practical. That is the sacred mission of the Theosophical Society, made clear by KH when he wrote: "The chief object of the T. S. is not so much to gratify individual aspirations as to serve our fellow men" (Letter 2).

If we aspire to a realization of the One, then we can change ourselves in such a way that we can get insight. We can lay aside our own preconceived ideas about people and see beyond appearances to the divine life that is deep within them as it is deep within us. Simply joining the Theosophical Society will not bring this about. We must have an iron, never-failing determination to bring it about in ourselves.

Dora Kunz was a past president of the Theosophical Society in America and a devoted student of the *Mahatma Letters*. In 1955 she gave a talk on the Masters. What she had to say has much to do with the kind of Brotherhood meant by the Masters. The following quote is from the transcript of her talk:

There are thousands of members of the Theosophical Society, but there are very few Theosophists. It is very easy to sign a piece of paper and say you want to join the Theosophical Society and that you believe in brotherhood, but brotherhood is something we should live instead of talking about it. The Theosophical Society is the testing ground for brotherhood. It is the place to let ourselves grow, to let ourselves understand that we are not to be dogmatic, to let ourselves learn to get along with one another whether we like one another or not. You must be willing to have differences of opinion. You must be willing to stand the acid test, even if you are called names. It is you who are being tested. If you walk out because one individual says something nasty to you, you are failing the test of brotherhood. . . . If you could think of the personalities that you meet as the acid test of your own character, of your own Theosophy, you would get a different point of view. When something comes up, ask yourself how you will take it, and ask yourself what it is about you that needs to be changed.

The tests are not easy. They require us to stand firm on the principle of brotherhood despite subtle or direct attacks on us. Personal injustice is never easy to bear, but nothing truly worthwhile is ever easy. Blavatsky tells us that "There is a road, steep and thorny, beset with perils of every kind, yet still a road, and it leads to the very heart of the universe." The thorns and perils come as personal injustice and the arduous tasks required in the self transformation process. There at the heart of the universe is the ultimate unity of all. Those in the Theosophical Society who even dimly sense that unity are forming a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity. Those who sense it work passionately to help their neighbors to sense it.

Although often veiled, the idea of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity appears in the world's great religious traditions. Perhaps ultimate unity is emphasized more frequently in Eastern religions, but it is not absent from Western religions. Let me close by quoting the text of a beautiful Christian hymn that poetically expresses the longing of humanity for ultimate unity. It begins by speaking of our destructive behavior, called in the hymn our "foolish ways." It goes on to say what might be if we awake out of our ignorance, called our "haunted sleep." Finally, it predicts the time when all will realize unity.

*Turn back, O man, forswear thy foolish ways.
Old now is earth, and none may count her days.
Yet thou, her child, whose head is crowned with flame,
Still wilt not hear thine inner God proclaim,
"Turn back, O man, forswear thy foolish ways."*

*Earth might be fair and all men glad and wise.
Age after age their tragic empires rise,
Built while they dream, and in that dreaming weep:
Would man but wake from out his haunted sleep,
Earth might be fair and all men glad and wise.*

*Earth shall be fair, and all her people one:
Nor till that hour shall God's whole will be done.
Now, even now, once more from earth to sky,
Peals forth in joy man's old undaunted cry:
"Earth shall be fair and all her folk be one!"*

BROTHERHOOD

The divine life is the spirit in everything that exists, from the atom to the archangel; the grain of dust could not be were God absent from it; the loftiest seraph is but a spark from the eternal fire, which is God. Sharers in one life all form one brotherhood. The immanence of God, the solidarity of man, such are the basic truths of theosophy.

Annie Besant

[Life, God, Fire](#)

Read more at

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/brotherhood.html#Qtthe2wYigjL3e31.99>

What is the essence of theosophy? It is the fact that man, being himself divine, can know the divinity whose life he shares. As an inevitable corollary to this supreme truth comes the fact of the brotherhood of man.

Annie Besant