

# THE ADEPTS

*By Annie Besant*

## **Who Is The Master?**

AMONG the many questions to which Theosophy gives rise, none perhaps awakens more interest and arouses more enquiry than that of the Masters. What is indicated by the term? Who are they? Where do they live? What do they do? These, and many other questions, are constantly heard. Let me try to throw a little light on these questions, to answer them, at least, partially.

A Master is a term applied to denote certain human beings, who have completed their human evolution, have attained human perfection, have nothing more to learn so far as our part of the solar system is concerned, have reached what the Christians call "Salvation", and the Hindus and Buddhists "Liberation". When the Christian Church still kept "the faith once delivered to the Saints" in its fulness, salvation meant much more than escape from everlasting damnation. It meant the release from compulsory reincarnation, safety from all possibility of failure in evolution. "To him that overcometh" was the promise that he should be "a pillar in the Temple of my God, and he shall go out no more". He that had overcome was "saved".

The conception of evolution, which implies a gradual expansion of consciousness, embodied in ever-improving material forms, underlies the conception of Masterhood. The perfection it connotes is to be reached by every human being, and clearly perfection cannot be gained in the course of one brief human life. The differences between man and man, between genius and dolt, between saint and criminal, between athlete and cripple, are only reconcilable with divine justice if each human being is in course of growth from savagery to nobility, and if differences are merely the signs of differing stages of that growth. At the apex of such a long evolution stands the "Master", embodying in himself the highest results possible to man of intellectual, moral, and spiritual development. He has learned all the lessons that humanity can assimilate, and the value of all the experience the world can give is his. Beyond this point, evolution is superhuman; if the conqueror returns to human life it is a voluntary action, for neither birth can seize him nor death touch him, save by his own consent.

We must add something to this for the full conception of Masterhood. The Master must be in a human body, must be incarnate. Many who reach this level no longer take up the burden of the flesh, but using only "the spiritual body" pass out of touch with this earth, and inhabit only loftier realms of existence. Further, a Master –as the name implies– takes pupils, and in strictness the term should only be applied to those who discharge the special function of helping men and women to tread the arduous road which takes them "by a short cut" to the summit of human evolution, far in advance of the bulk of their fellow-men. Evolution has been compared to a road winding round and round a hill in an ascending spiral, and along that road humanity slowly advances; there is a short cut to the top of the hill, straight, narrow, rugged and steep, and "few there be that find it". Those few are the pupils, or "disciples" of the Masters. As in the days of the Christ, they must "forsake all and follow Him".

Those who are at this level, but do not take pupils, are concerned in other lines of service to the world, whereof something will presently be said. There is no English name to distinguish

these from the teachers, and so, perforce, the word "Master" is applied to them also. In India, where these various functions are known as coming down from a remote antiquity, there are different names for the different functions, but it would be difficult to popularize these in English.

We may take, then, as a definition of a Master: a human being who has perfected himself and has nothing more to learn on earth, who lives in a physical body on earth for the helping of man, who takes pupils that desire to evolve more rapidly in order to serve it, and are willing to forsake all for this purpose.

### **The Perfect Man: His Place In Evolution**

It may, perhaps, be necessary to add, for the information of those who are not familiar with the Theosophical conception of evolution, that when we say "a Perfect Man" we mean a good deal more than is generally connoted by the phrase. We mean a consciousness which is able to function unbrokenly through the five great spheres in which evolution is proceeding: the physical, intermediate and heavenly worlds, to which all men are now related, and in addition to these the two higher heavens –St. Paul, it may be remembered, speaks of the "third heaven"– which ordinary humanity cannot as yet enter. A Master's consciousness is at home in all these and includes them all, and his refined and subtle bodies function freely in them all, so that he can at any time know and act at will in any part of any one of them.

The grade occupied by the Masters is the fifth in the great Brotherhood, the members of which have outpaced normal evolution. The four lower grades consist of initiated disciples, who live and labour for the most part unknown in the everyday world, carrying on the work assigned to them by their superiors. At certain times in human history, in serious crises, in the transitions from one type of civilization to another, members of the Occult Hierarchy, Masters and even loftier Beings, come out into the world. Normally, although incarnate, they remain in retired and secluded spots, away from the tumult of human life, in order to carry on the helpful work which would be impossible of accomplishment in the crowded haunts of men.

### **Where Do They Live**

They live in different countries, scattered over the world. The Master Jesus lives mostly in the mountains of Lebanon; the Master Hilarion in Egypt –he wears a Cretan body; the Masters M. and K. H. in Tibet, near Shigatse, both using Indian bodies; the Master Rakoczi in Hungary, but travelling much; I do not know the dwelling-places of "the Venetian" and the Master "Serapis". Dwelling-places of the physical body seem to mean so little when the swift movements of the subtle body, freed at will from the grosser one, carry the owner whither he wills at any time. "Place" loses its ordinary significance to those who are free denizens of space, coming and going at will. And though one knows that they have abiding-places where dwells usually the physical body, that body is so much of vesture, at any moment to be readily laid aside, that the "where" loses its interest to a great extent.

## **Their Work**

They aid, in countless ways, the progress of humanity. From the highest sphere they shed down light and life on all the world, that may be taken up and assimilated, as freely as the sunshine, by all who are receptive enough to take it in. As the physical world lives by the life of God, focused by the sun, so does the spiritual world live by that same life, focused by the Occult Hierarchy. Next, the Masters specially connected with religions use these religions as reservoirs into which they pour spiritual energy, to be distributed to the faithful in each religion through the duly appointed "means of grace". Next comes the great intellectual work, wherein the Masters send out thought-forms of high intellectual power to be caught up by men of genius, assimilated by them and given out to the world; on this level also they send out their wishes to their disciples, notifying them of the tasks to which they should set their hands.

Then comes the work in the lower mental world, the generation of the thought-forms which influence the concrete mind and guide it along useful lines of activity in this world, and the teaching of those who are living in the heavenly world. Then the large activities of the intermediate world, the helping of the so-called dead, the general direction and supervision of the teaching of the younger pupils and the sending of aid in numberless cases of need. In the physical world the watching of the tendencies of events, the correction and neutralizing, as far as law permits, of evil currents, the constant balancing of the forces that work for and against evolution, the strengthening of the good, the weakening of the evil. In conjunction with the Angels of the Nations also they work, guiding the spiritual forces as the others guide the material, choosing and rejecting actors in the great Drama, supplying needful impulses in the right direction.

These are but a few of the activities ceaselessly carried on in every sphere by the Guardians of humanity, some of the activities which come within our limited vision. They stand as a Guardian Wall around humanity, within which it can progress, uncrushed by the tremendous cosmic forces which play around our planetary house. From time to time, one of them comes forth into the world of men, as a great religious teacher, to carry on the task of spreading a new form of the Eternal Verities, a form suitable to a new civilization. Their ranks include all the greatest Prophets of the Faiths of the world, and while a religion lives one of these great Ones is ever at its head, hatching over it as his special charge.