

**Chelaship**

*There are Chelas and Chelas, just as there are MAHATMAS and MAHATMAS. There are MAHATMAS in fact, who are themselves the Chelas of those who are higher yet. But no one, for an instant, would confound a Chela who has just begun his troublous journey with that greater Chela who is a MAHATMA.*

H.P. Blavatsky  
*Theosophist*, Oct., 1884

Masters of Wisdom, Mahatmas, Rishis, Sages—call them by what honorific name wished—have been present to humanity since before its exoteric recorded histories. Such beings influence human life on earth in myriad manners on many planes, on behalf of universal human enlightenment. Their existence and their many functionings, have been known to Initiates in the Mysteries throughout humanity’s evolutionary cyclic physical and spiritual development. It is taught that during mankind’s Golden Ages these beings walked among us—recognized, revered, their teachings readily followed. Mankind’s last truly Golden Age ceased before recorded history. For nearly three thousand years, the existence of these beings remained largely unknown, especially in the West. It was not until the existence of Masters of Wisdom was made public through the writings of H. P. Blavatsky—in the nineteenth century—that Mahatmas, Rishis, Sages, were made

## **Chelaship**

known once again. Blavatsky spoke of “the two Mahatmas behind the formation of the Theosophical Society,” and, over time, of several of their Chelas (Disciples) sent by them to help her in her work. It wasn’t until 1888 that she established and made publicly known “The Esoteric Section” of the Theosophical Society.

To desire to become a Chela is to offer one’s self as a student to Masters of Wisdom. Prior to 1888, a number of individuals had asked H.P. Blavatsky if they could become Chelas. This led her to write a number of articles explaining: what are Mahatmas, what are Chelas, as well as correcting common absurd misconceptions of the true meaning of each term. These were published in her two magazines “The Theosophist” and “Lucifer.”

The sacred Master-Chela relationship is ageless, universal, understood only within the Mysteries. It is taught by Raghavan Iyer that the strict laws governing Chelaship are timeless and unchanging. Buddha, knowing this, had nonetheless “broadly widened access” to the Mysteries. H. P. Blavatsky broadened the access even further. Thus: broader access, same rules, same way as always.

Should one have the rare opportunity of meeting a being capable of administering the Pledges—also ever unchanging—and realizing it, asks to become a Chela, certain information will be given if appropriate. The Candidate is taught the occult

### **Chelaship**

meaning of taking The Pledges. They are not taken to any being outside of one's self to no Teacher, no Mahatma, no god or gods. The telling phrase is "...so help me, my Higher Self." The Pledges are taken to one's self, "for life and for lives."

The Candidate is given The Pledges to deeply consider over time until a decision is made whether to take them. One has in no sense failed spiritually if one chooses not to take them. This is clearly explained. In addition, the *would-be Chela* is given readings spelling out several inevitable results following from taking these Pledges. It is explained that taking the Pledges is to ask "the Pure Light to shine into the darkest corners of one's being." The taking of Pledges activates an occult process whereby every aspect of one's being will come to light, good or bad. As Blavatsky related,

*Chelaship was defined, the other day, by a Mahatma as a "psychic solvent, which eats away all dross and leaves only the pure gold behind."*

The eating away of all one's dross is a most painful, unpleasant process, the experience of which is called "Pledge Fever". The deeper, purer and more sincere one's motives for taking the Pledges, the greater will be one's experience of Pledge Fever. In taking the Pledges one is being given a double-edged opportunity: to encounter and to master all of one's karma in this incarnation—an occult acceleration of an otherwise natural process—or to utterly fail in the attempt. This is explained to

## **Chelaship**

the would-be Chela in some detail. It is made clear that this is the most difficult of all possible human undertakings. One must think deeply, long and hard about whether one truly feels he or she possesses the adamantine will, the courage for such an undertaking, a vowed willingness to persevere no matter what.

To take the Pledges confers no privilege, brings no thrilling new esoteric teachings, does not bring one into conscious contact with any Mahatma.

*...he need never expect the most distant approach to the “favor” of one of our Mahatmas, or any other Mahatmas in the world—should the latter consent to become known—that has not been fully earned by personal merit. ‘The Mahatmas are the servants, not the arbiters of the Law of Karma.’ LAY CHELASHIP CONFERS NO PRIVILEGE UPON ANY ONE EXCEPT THAT OF WORKING FOR MERIT UNDER THE OBSEVTION OF A MASTER. And whether that Master be or be not seen by the Chela makes no difference whatever as to the result: his good thoughts, words and deeds will bear their fruits, his evil ones, theirs.*

It is also explained that having taken the Pledges, one has become a “Probationary Chela,” and will be left entirely to his or her own devices during the period of one’s probation, the period during which the psychic resolvment works its many faceted magic. No help will be given by the Teachers.

The Pledges themselves must be considered separately and as a whole. One may be told an ancient motto: “Know. Will.

## **Chelaship**

Dare. Remain silent.” The need to develop “occult secrecy”—a secrecy in thought, not merely in word—is stressed.

The term Probationary Chela refers to a condition in which the student has entered the outer perimeters of the Mysteries, a period, of no set duration, of the most severe testing on every level of the Probationary Chela’s being. These tests are administered by no one. They arise from within. One must face not only all one’s previously unknown strengths and weaknesses but also one’s share, so to speak, of familial, national, and collective global karma.

*One who undertakes to try for Chelaship by that very act rouses and lashes to desperation every sleeping passion of his animal nature. For this is the commencement of a struggle for the mastery in which quarter is neither to be given nor taken. It is, once for all, ‘To be, or Not to be’; to conquer means ADEPTSHIP; to fail, an ignoble Martyrdom...*

Not only must one’s illusions, shortcomings, and darkneses be encountered and transmuted, but also timeless qualifications for Accepted Chelaship must be developed to a particular, esoteric degree. These qualifications have “been invariably insisted upon, and all must have been more or less developed in the inner nature by the Chela’s UNHELPED EXERTIONS, before he could be actually put to the test.” To wit: mental and physical purity, unselfishness of purpose, heartfelt charity towards all, unswerving faith in the complete

### **Chelaship**

justness of the Law of Karma—not to be obstructed by or caused to deviate through any exoteric ritual or ceremony, undaunted courage in any emergency—even unto death, “an intuitional perception of one’s being the vehicle of the manifested *Avalokitesvara* or Divine Atman (Spirit),” and “Calm indifference for, but a just appreciation of everything that constitutes the objective and transitory world, in its relation with, and to, the invisible regions.”

These are among the qualities needing to be nurtured by the Probationary Chela. For the most part, their nurturing involves denaturing, eliminating, through regenerating, all obscurations remaining between the would-be Chela and these ageless, unchanging qualifications. This is to be accomplished, as mentioned, without aid from the Teachers. When any particular Candidate attains a certain degree of proficiency with these qualifications, he or she will receive their first direct teachings from their *Sat-Guru*. They have now become an accepted Chela of a single Guru. The ageless tests of The Mysteries begin. It is made perfectly clear by those who know that becoming an accepted Chela, confers upon one little at all. What is conferred is the willingness to be tested, combined with a long-held vow to never cease trying.

In order to move to broader, deeper levels of realization, the student must not only enlarge their heart of compassion, but also must strive to both transcend and master the following

### **Chelaship**

aspects of his or her lower four vehicles: body, senses, faults, and pain. Having, to whatever degree, attained this condition, the student is, to *that very degree*, able to:

“...become one with his *Manas*—mind; *Buddhi*—intellection, or spiritual intelligence; and *Atma*—highest soul, i.e., spirit. When he is ready for this, and, further, to recognize in *Atma* the highest ruler in the world of perceptions, and in the will, the highest executive energy (power), then may he, under the time-honoured rules, be taken in hand by one of the Initiates.”

This level of attainment upon the Path is said to be rare.

The Three Objects of the founding The Theosophical Society by H. P. Blavatsky, W.Q. Judge and H. S. Olcott November 17, 1875, were:

1. Establishment of a nucleus of Universal Brotherhood.
2. Translation and study of the world's great spiritual traditions.
3. Study of the hidden forces in nature and in man.

The Mahatmas conveyed, through H.P. Blavatsky, that the First Object was far and above the most important of the three, could not be stressed too strongly. In her various articles on Chelaship, H.P. Blavatsky indicates that a primary reason for the failure of so many Candidates was their failure to place the first object well before the third, thus, unknown to

**Chelaship**

themselves, occultly preventing themselves from success. “To live to benefit mankind is the first step.” The whole must come before the part. As Raghavan Iyer once said to a Probationary Chela, “Though 10 is the Pythagorean Perfect Number, the aspirant must always place the 0 before the 1.”

While it is true that this account of Chelaship may feel forbiddingly mysterious, it might be well—from the standpoint of maintaining a balanced perspective—to consider Iyer’s oft-repeated written words, “Any person can, having given it prolonged deep thought, constitute one’s self a Probationary Chela, independent of contact with any Initiate.”

Barrett Culmback

August 1, 2008