

How Theosophy Defeats Racism

Understanding the Law of Justice, of Ethics and Universal Brotherhood

Carlos Cardoso Aveline



“The white race must be the first to stretch out the hand of fellowship to the dark nations, to call the poor despised ‘nigger’ brother. This prospect may not smile to all, but he is no Theosophist who objects to this principle.”

[The Maha-Chohan, in “Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom”, transcribed by C. Jinarajadasa, TPH, Adyar, India, 1948, First Series, Letter 1, p. 5.]

Years ago a North-American member of **E-Theosophy** group¹ wrote to us and said that he suspected esoteric philosophy had a racist view regarding African nations and black people.

When we asked him for evidence and clarification, our friend started by mentioning a few statements made by William Q. Judge on the black race, which can be seen on chapter 9 of his book “Echoes From the Orient”.²

The topic is polemical and deserves examination. Theosophists have the duty to publicly clarify their views with regard to such an aggressive form of ignorance. An excessive postponement of the task would not be good karma.

Symbolic Words, Misunderstood by Judge

While the whole chapter 9 of “Echoes From the Orient” gives the reader the context of Judge’s views, the crux of the matter is on p. 27, where he quotes from “The Secret Doctrine” (SD).

The first unfortunate circumstance is that Judge forgot to make an accurate quotation and duly indicate the page in the SD. Let us see the exact words used by Blavatsky, which she herself reproduced from a secret esoteric book of Eastern Wisdom, the Book of Dzyan. We find the quotation on page 20, volume II of “The Secret Doctrine”.³ It refers to the four initial races or phases of development of present humanity.

The SD says:

“THE FIRST, ON EVERY ZONE, WAS MOON-COLOURED; THE SECOND, YELLOW, LIKE GOLD; THE THIRD, RED; THE FOURTH, BROWN, WHICH BECAME BLACK WITH SIN.”

The same passage from the sacred and secret book is given again on page 227 of volume II, in the [SD](#) - this time with a few explanations.

Given the complexity of the symbology involved in the passage, it is not a bad idea to see once more the same idea, now as it is given on p. 227, and with a few changes made by Blavatsky:

“THE FIRST (*Race*) ON EVERY ZONE WAS MOON-COLOURED (*yellow-white*); THE SECOND, YELLOW, LIKE GOLD; THE THIRD, RED; THE FOURTH, BROWN, WHICH BECAME BLACK WITH SIN.”

To this Blavatsky adds a footnote:

¹ The correspondence took place by 2015. As to the study group, click to see or to join [E-Theosophy](#) at Google Groups: <https://groups.google.com/g/e-theosophy>.

² “Echoes From the Orient”, by William Q. Judge, The Theosophy Company, Los Angeles, USA, 1995, 64 pages.

³ Click to see volume II of “[The Secret Doctrine](#)”.

“Strictly speaking, it is only from the time of the Atlantean, brown and yellow giant Races, that one ought to speak of MAN, since it was the Fourth race only which was the first *completely human species*, however much larger in size than we are now. In ‘Man’ (by Two Chelas), all that is said of the Atlanteans is quite correct. It is chiefly that race which became ‘black with sin’ that brought the divine names of the Asuras, the Rakshasas and the Daityas into disrepute, and passed them on to posterity as the names of fiends. For, as said, the Suras (gods) or Devas having incarnated in the wise men of Atlantis, the names of *Asuras* and *Rakshasas* were given to the Atlanteans; which names, owing to their incessant conflicts with the last remnants of the Third Race and the ‘Sons of Will and Yoga’, have led to the later allegories about them in the Puranas. ‘Asura was the generic appellation of all the Atlanteans who were the enemies of the spiritual heroes of the Aryans (gods).’ (‘Man’, p. 97.)”

The main idea here is that the fourth race got “black with sin”.

Of course the words “black with sin” refer to the *moral nature of humanity*, not to the color of its skin. Yet William Judge, perhaps writing in haste, had the extremely unfortunate idea of directly connecting the morality of ethnic groups to the colour of skin of their members.

Thus Judge proceeds on p. 27 of his book “Echoes From the Orient”:

“Topinard, in his *Anthropology*, gives support to this, as he says that there are three fundamental colors in the human organism - red, yellow and black. The brown race, which became black with sin, refers to the Atlantean sorcerer race of which I spoke in my last; its awfully evil practices, both mental and physical, having produced a change in the color of the skin.”

Judge forgot to take into consideration the fact that, as nearly everyone knows, the whole language of “The Book of Dzyan” is symbolical and metaphorical. He was naïve enough to say that the black skin of our African brothers and sisters is due to the sins of the fourth race.

The expression “black with sin” reappears on pp. 250, 319, 350, vol. II of the SD, being used within inverted commas, which makes it obvious that it is not literally said, but figuratively instead. It is a reference to a moral state. On p. 372, SD volume II, we see that “black with sin” applies to **Atlantis**, the island having become “black with sins and perished”.

On a footnote on p. 408, volume II of the SD, **HPB expressly writes that the expression “black with sin” is “a figure of speech”, which means it must not be taken literally.**

Judge seems to have made the mistake of following the racist and non-theosophical ideas of Mr. Topinard, a conventional man of science of 19th century, whose book, in fact, is far from theosophical.

There is, however, one sentence in Topinard’s book which corroborates a specific aspect of Theosophy. HPB mentions that on p. 249, footnote, volume II of the SD. Thinking in a hurry, Judge seems to have understood that the whole book by Topinard should be good.

It is not. Far from that.

The whole 19th century science was largely “black with sin”, figuratively. Helena Blavatsky makes it very clear in “The Secret Doctrine”.

Thus it is important to move away from Mr. Judge's wrong impressions and understand and share the theosophical view of human races as it is. After all, the motto of the theosophical movement says "**there is no religion higher than truth**". Besides, one of the chief slanders against the theosophical movement has been that of racism.

It must be made public that the theosophical movement defends each and every ethnicity which is unjustly attacked, among them our black and Jewish brothers and sisters. The movement has been working for universal brotherhood since its foundation by Helena Blavatsky in 1875. We are keen to fight anti-brotherly ideologies involving color of skin, anti-Semitism and other Nazi-like ideas.

Theosophists are **friends of all beings**, and are adversaries to any form of racism or organized hatred. We see all beings as brothers. We are humble truth-seekers. We struggle along the path to the wisdom of altruism and self-forgetfulness.

Confronted with these clarifications, the friendly reader who raised the issue of racism in theosophy asked a question about how the topic is approached in the Mahatma Letters. He had heard negative ideas.

Indian Masters Are Seen as 'Niggers'

We then brought a few facts to the debate:

1) On Letter 5 of "The Mahatma Letters", p. 18, the Master refers to the fact that he himself - a native of India - is considered a "nigger" by British people.

The teacher says:

"... You must not confound your own private views - especially those you have now - with those of your countrymen in general. Few [British citizens], if any - (of course with such exceptions as yourself, where intensity of aspirations makes one disregard all other considerations) - would ever consent to have 'a nigger' for a guide or leader, no more than a modern Desdemona would choose an Indian Othello nowadays. The prejudice of race is intense, and even in free England we are regarded as an 'inferior race'."

2) While examining the Western habit of calling an impostor every true sage and mystic who appears in our blessed countries, the Master writes, incidentally mentioning that the Indian Yogis are usually called "niggers":

"Were not St. Germain, and Cagliostro, both gentlemen of the highest education and achievements - and presumably *Europeans* - not 'niggers' of my sort - regarded at the time, and still so regarded by posterity - as impostors, confederates, jugglers and what not?"⁴

⁴ Letter LIV, or 54, in "[The Mahatma Letters](#)", upper half of page 306.

3) Finally, a decisive advice is given to our civilization in “Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom”. A Mahatma says:

“The white race must be the first to stretch out the hand of fellowship to the dark nations, to call the poor despised ‘nigger’ brother. This prospect may not smile to all, but he is no Theosophist who objects to this principle.”⁵

These are fundamental facts with regard to the Law of universal brotherhood and the future of our civilization. They must be taken into consideration by every true student of esoteric philosophy.

Sure, spiritual and intellectual abilities are differently distributed among nations and ethnical groups around the globe. The Mahatma Letters point to these differences, and say, for instance, that some African or Mongolian ethnic groups belong to more ancient races and do not have the intellectual capabilities of the Western nations (Letter XVII, p. 118). But in the same page the Master says that “refinement, polishedness, and brilliant education (...) have very little to do with the course of higher Nature’s law.” The Chinese *Tao Teh Ching* teaches esoteric philosophy in simple words, with the highest efficiency. Not to mention the Book of Dzyan.



The Master says on page 118 of the Mahatma Letters that some nations have intuitive consciousness, others intellectual consciousness. Fourth race has other qualities often more important than mere intellect, which is the possession of fifth race.

The Mongolians are not as intellectually inclined as Western citizens. They are more spiritually inclined. In the letter XXXV (or 35) of H.P. Blavatsky to Sinnett, one can see

⁵ The Maha-Chohan, in “[Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom](#)”, transcribed by C. Jinarajadasa, TPH, Adyar, India, 1948, First Series, [Letter 1, p. 5](#).

something about the spiritual potentialities of indigenous peoples, in Asia as in Latin America. Blavatsky writes:

“... But there are other chelas of other Masters - ‘greasy Tibetans’ *pur sang* - I know some of these gentlemen, to be *fine fleur* of future adeptship or - of signal *failure* as many of them may experience. And I know, that they love your ‘Western Metaphysicians’ still less than they do Orthodox Brahmins.”

A few words later she says that the Masters of these advanced disciples “are pure blooded Mongolian Buddhists”. These disciples are imperfect and make mistakes, because “they are chelas after all”, says Blavatsky, “and there is much of the mortal man in them yet.” She adds: “They are great friends with the native Peruvian, Mexican and Red Indian Adepts and chelas.”⁶

Classic theosophical literature says that indigenous peoples all over the planet have their wise people connected to the Masters of the Himalayas who themselves are Chinese, Mongolian, Tibetan and belong to other nationalities as well. The literature makes it clear that Initiates of the “white” Western Europe are extremely rare. The Mahatma Letters show the cultural and spiritual conflict between colonialist “Christianity” and the native traditions of India, Tibet, China, Mongolia and other parts of the world. Mere rational intellectuality, often heartless, is severely denounced as *worse than useless* by Masters and HPB alike.

Regarding human races, one has to study the whole teaching of the Masters and HPB in order to better understand the issue, and isolated sentences often cause more confusion than learning.

It could still be questioned:

“How could William Judge, one of the founders of the theosophical movement, misunderstand such a basic point?”

One must not forget that there is a vast difference between disciples and teachers.

The Plain Unvarnished Truth

Disciples are trying to learn and they often fail in this or that specific aspect. Judge was indeed a disciple of HPB’s. He was a limited disciple, not in the opinion of anyone living in the 21st century, but in his own opinion, for Judge is the first to clarify the issue. He honestly confesses he and others were but *pawns on the chessboard* of theosophy:

“The plain unvarnished truth, which hurts no one save the man who denies it, is that H. P. Blavatsky was the head, front, bottom, top, outskirts, past and future of the Theosophical Society. We were all but pawns on the chessboard. What is the use of permitting vanity to influence us toward denying the facts? No game, no battle, no diplomacy can go forward without agents, subordinates, generals, privates, but there is always a moving head without whom there would be no success. Not only was H. P. B.

⁶ “The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett”, TUP, Pasadena, Letter XXV, p. 85.

predominant with us in 1875, but she is yet. The very organization was suggested by her...” ⁷

On the other hand, one must remember that Judge and Blavatsky often differed in important matters, as is amply demonstrated in the 19 texts of **“Letters Between Blavatsky and Judge”**.

“Letters Between Blavatsky and Judge - 17”, for instance, has this subtitle: “Difficulties Expand in the Dialogue Between The Two Founders”. It is only natural, although unfortunate, that he did not understand that “black with sin” does not refer to the color of skin, and is only a metaphor. One should also remember that Judge dedicated his life to the cause of a universal brotherhood which ignores racial, religious, ideological and other social differences, but takes the side of all those who are persecuted and victims of injustice, anytime, anywhere.

Besides the sad mistake on page 27 of “Echoes from the Orient”, Judge also imagined and wrote that the Chinese people, descending from the fourth race, was in its final decay and doomed to extinction. In “The Ocean of Theosophy”, he baselessly announces:

“It has been sometimes thought by ethnologists that the more civilized races kill off the others, but the fact is that in consequence of the great difference between the Egos inhabiting the old race body and the energy of that body itself, the females begin to be sterile, and thus slowly but surely the number of deaths exceed the births. China itself is in process of decay, she being now in the almost stationary stage just before the rush downward.” ⁸

This was written after HPB had died. In the 2020s it is difficult not to see that there are perhaps more signs of decay in the Western Civilization ⁹ than in China.

William Judge was not a racist, though: far from that. He was human and made mistakes.

Esoteric Tradition in African Nations

I would like to conclude with a few annotations indicating sources of further information on esoteric wisdom in African nations.

1) The author of the book “The Sayings of the Ancient One” is P.G. Bowen, the son of Robert Bowen. Robert Bowen was a personal student of Helena Blavatsky in London. “The Sayings of the Ancient One” is an approach to African esoteric tradition and was published by the TPH in London. It has 160 pages. First edition, 1935, second edition, 1985. Subtitle: “A Unique Re-Statement of the Ageless Wisdom”.

2) The article “African Magic”, by Tau Triadelta, was published by HP Blavatsky in her London magazine in November 1890.

⁷ From his article “A Reminiscence”. See [“The Main Founder of the Movement”](#).

⁸ “The Ocean of Theosophy”, by William Q. Judge, The Theosophy Company, Los Angeles, California, USA, 1987, 172 pp., see p. 85. Chinese people is “doomed to extinction” also on page 124.

⁹ See the article [“China and the Implosion of the West”](#).

3) The article “The Chain of Life: From Stone to Divinity”, by Ida Postma, was published in the Theosophical magazine “Sunrise”, November 1977 (TUP-Pasadena), and is dedicated to the African spiritual traditions.

Gandhi, Mandela, Nyerere

4) The cultural influence of India in Africa is significant, and Mahatma Gandhi is one example among others. Gandhi made his first contact with the theosophical movement while studying Law in London in 1889. This caused a powerful change in his worldview. He personally met Helena Blavatsky in November 1889 but decided not join the theosophical movement because “with my meagre knowledge of my own religion, I did not want to belong to any religious body”.¹⁰ When on 26 March, 1891, Gandhi became a member of the Blavatsky Lodge in London, HPB was still alive and working. He soon went back to India, and two years later he went to Africa. Sylvia Cranston writes:

“When Gandhi went to South Africa, in 1893, he came into close contact with the theosophists at the Johannesburg TS: ‘I had religious discussions with them every day. There used to be readings from theosophical books, and sometimes I had occasion to address their meetings’. In 1895, he wrote: ‘I intend to spread as much as possible information about Theosophy’.”¹¹

5) South African political leader Nelson Mandela (1918-2013) had a largely spiritual view of life.

6) The philosophical views of Julius Nyerere (1922-1999), the popular leader and statesman of Tanzania, should be taken into account. There is an authentic wisdom behind the “ujamaa” ideal and Nyerere’s policies and actions. The fact is well-known that English thinker John Ruskin deeply inspired Mahatma Gandhi regarding social and economic realities. Ruskin seems also to have inspired Julius Nyerere, as shown in the book “**Influence Politique de John Ruskin en Afrique: L’exemple d’Ujamaa de Julius Nyerere**”, by Ely Ould Sneiba.¹² However, such social ideas are in harmony with the occult wisdom tradition in Africa itself, of which the ideal of the **Ujamaa** (‘community’, or literally ‘familyhood’ in Swahili) is an example. Not to mention the ancient social teachings of the **Andes** in South America, or the **Tao Teh Ching** in China (especially chapter 80), among others.

7) Author Théun Mares was born in Zimbabwe, Africa, in 1952, and had books published in South Africa which are inspired one way or another by the Central American Toltec tradition.

¹⁰ “HPB - The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky, Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement”, by Sylvia Cranston, a Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam Book, New York, copyright 1993, paperback 1994 edition, 648 pp., see p. 195.

¹¹ “HPB - The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky, Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement”, by Sylvia Cranston, pp. 195-196.

¹² Copyright 2019, Éditions universitaires européennes.

8) In the United States, a remarkable example of such peaceful and constructive philosophy of social evolution is given by Martin Luther King.¹³

The African Section of the Brotherhood

9) It is worthwhile to examine “Capoeira”, the popular martial art and dance of black people in Brazil. A spiritual training is potentially present in this cultural tradition.

10) In his “Old Diary Leaves”, volume I, Henry Olcott refers to the African Section of the Brotherhood of Adepts. He writes:

“It has been already explained that I first worked under the Egyptian part of the African section [*of the Universal Mystic Brotherhood*] and later under the Indian section.”¹⁴

11) Other sources are many. One must pay attention, however, to the unavoidable duality between two quite different magnetic fields: that of altruism and Ethics, and that of selfishness, often disguised under the elegant appearance of spirituality and “occultism”.

12) Friends and readers who want to exchange ideas with us and help investigating spiritual traditions from African nations are invited to write to the Independent Lodge of Theosophists. More evidence is welcome of the presence of peaceful cooperation, eternal wisdom and universal ethics, in African nations and African Descent communities.

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¹³ Regarding Martin Luther King, click to see the article “[Moshe Cordovero and Social Activism](#)”.

¹⁴ “Old Diary Leaves”, H. S. Olcott, first series, third printing, Adyar, India, 1974, 490 pp., see p. 76, footnote.