

The Concept of God in the Mahatma Letters

Vicente Hao Chin Jr.

Two of the most controversial letters written by the Mahatma Koot Hoomi are the ones about God (Letters No. 88 and 90 in the chronological edition of the *Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*). Many theosophists hesitate to discuss these letters because their views on God go straight against the usual religious concepts of God in Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The subject can be troubling to some, but there comes a point in the life of every earnest theosophist who desires to seek truth above any ism, when this topic can no longer be skirted, and he or she must confront the issues raised not only by this letter but by the writings of H. P. Blavatsky on the same topic, especially in the *Secret Doctrine*, (which is co-authored by the Mahatmas K.H. and Morya, as stated in Letter no. 19 of *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, Ser. I).

BACKGROUND

Most reflective persons are vaguely aware that there is something wrong with the popular concepts of God. If God is all good, why is there evil and suffering in the world? If God is all-merciful, why will some people go to hell?

If we go beyond popular belief and go deeper into theology and biblical studies, we encounter even worse kinds of incongruities.

In the Old Testament, the Lord God repented many times what he had done (Gen 6:6, Exo 32:14, 1Sam 15:11, 1 Chron 21:15, Jer 15:6, etc.)¹ which implies that he did not foresee that his decisions and actions would turn out to be wrong. More seriously, it means that God makes mistakes. This alone would make the common concept of God unbelievable and absurd. But this is just one of the many points.

The God of the Old Testament also gets angry and wrathful (Nahum 1:2, Zeph 1:18, etc.)². And when he does, he can be very cruel, like drowning all men, women, children, land animals and birds (except those in the Ark), or ordering Joshua to slaughter all men, women, children and animals in cities that Joshua was told to grab in Canaan and other places after they left Egypt.

The Lord also gets jealous of other gods (Exo 34:14, Josh 24:19, etc.)³. Common sense tells us that an all-powerful God cannot be jealous about anything since he can do whatever he wants. Jealousy is a sign of insecurity and uncertainty, which no omniscient being can ever feel. But a more important historical and biblical background on this is that the Jews of those times were actually polytheistic, contrary to the popular conception that they were monotheistic. Jehovah was actually only one of the many gods that the Jews

¹ Gen 6:6: "And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." Exo 32:14: "And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people." 1 Sam 15:11: "It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king. . .", etc.

² Nahum 1:2: ". . . the Lord revengeth, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies."

³ Exo 34:14: "For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."

themselves recognize. See the following verses: Ps 97:9, Ps 82:1, Deut 32:12.⁴ They were monotheistic only in the sense that they were loyal or beholden to one particular Lord, and were not supposed to follow the others. Furthermore, Jehovah was not even the highest God. There is one higher than him called El or Elyon (translated in English as "the Most High") who apportioned mankind into groups, and Jehovah's share or dominion was only the people of Jacob or Israel (Deut 32:8-9, Zech 2:12)⁵.

God also could not do everything, such as when he could not defeat the armies of the Canaanites: "And the Lord was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; But could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron." (Judg 1:19)

If we expand this discussion wider we encounter insolvable contradictions when theistic religions assume that God is omniscient and at the same time human beings have free will. If God knows everything, he would have the foreknowledge of who will go to heaven or hell even before the world was created. This could not be changed, otherwise his foreknowledge would have been wrong. This logical conclusion, which is also confirmed by several Bible verses (Eph 1:5, Rom 8:29, Eph 1:11, Acts 4:28)⁶, compelled Martin Luther and John Calvin to adopt the doctrine of predestination, which says that those who would be saved and those who would be condemned to eternal hell are already unalterably predetermined since the beginning of time. If indeed God is omniscient, then this fatalistic view is logical and correct; but this puts into question the value of all efforts to be good and religious since people have been predestined to either happiness and perfidy regardless of what evil or good that they do in this life.

Then add to this is the oft-declared all-goodness of God in the face of evil in the world. How could God allow evil to happen in a world that he said was good at the time of creation?⁷ The usual answer that this is due to human freewill is contradicted by the Old Testament itself, which says that God was the one who created evil (Isaiah 45:7). In one passage it even says, "Is there any evil in this city that the Lord had not put there?" (Amos 3:6) This dilemma has spawned an entire branch of theology called Theodicy, where there remain no clear answers because the assumption about the nature of God remains unaltered.

In the Mahatma Letter No. 90, the Mahatma KH asks A. O. Hume:

I cannot help asking you, how do you or how can you know that your God is all wise, omnipotent and love-ful, when everything in nature, physical and moral,

⁴ Ps 82:1: "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods." Ps 97:9: "For thou, Lord art high above all the earth: thou art exalted far above all gods."

⁵ Deut 32:8-9 "When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance." In the Septuagint (Greek), the words "children of Israel" was "angels of God."

⁶ Rom 8:29-30 "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son . . . Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Eph 1:5 "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will."

⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, when he visited the former German concentration camp in Auschwitz, asked: "Why, Lord, did you remain silent?"

proves such a being, if he does exist, to be quite the reverse of all you say of him? Strange delusion and one which seems to overpower your very intellect. (p. 282)

Much, much more could be said but the above is probably enough for a thoughtful person to see that the concept of God in popular religion is fraught with contradictions and untenable conclusions that go against human reason, common sense and intuition. With all the brilliant theologians through the centuries, how come there seems no solution to all these contradictions? Is it no wonder that as of 2001, there were 33,800 different Christian denominations all over the world many of whom could not agree with the others on the nature of God, Jesus, Bible or Christianity itself?

Letter No. 88

From this background we may better appreciate the letter on God by the Mahatma K.H. This letter contains notes for A. O. Hume who intended to write an article on the subject. In this letter the Mahatma goes into the root of the issue -- the nature and existence of God itself -- rather than argue about peripheral issues that are rooted in questionable assumptions.

The very first paragraph of the letter goes straight into the central issue:

Neither our philosophy nor ourselves believe in a God. . . . We know there are planetary and other spiritual lives, and we know there is in our system no such thing as God, either personal or impersonal. Parabrahm is not a God, but absolute immutable law, and Iswar is the effect of Avidya and Maya, ignorance based upon the great delusion. The word "God" was invented to designate the unknown cause of those effects which man has either admired or dreaded without understanding them, and since we claim and that we are able to prove what we claim -- *i.e.* the knowledge of that cause and causes we are in a position to maintain there is no God or Gods behind them.

Now this sounds like plain atheism. But take note what H. P. Blavatsky wrote:

The Secret Doctrine teaches no *Atheism*, except in the Hindu sense of the word *nastika*, or the rejection of *idols*, including every anthropomorphic god. In this sense every Occultist is a *Nastika*. (SD, I, 279)

Letter no. 88 continues:

The idea of God is not an innate but an acquired notion The God of the Theologians is simply an imaginary power, *un loup garou* as d'Holbach expressed it -- a power which has never yet manifested itself. Our chief aim is to deliver humanity of this nightmare, to teach man virtue for its own sake, and to walk in life relying on himself instead of leaning on a theological crutch, that for countless ages was the direct cause of nearly all human misery. Pantheistic we may be called -- agnostic NEVER. . . .

The Nature of the Deity

If the Masters or the Secret Doctrine does not teach Atheism, what then does it teach? It teaches a Transcendent Reality so different from historical gods, whether personal or

impersonal, so all-inclusive and transcendent that it is beyond human comprehension. This in fact is the first fundamental proposition of the *Secret Doctrine*:

An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable PRINCIPLE on which all speculation is impossible, since it transcends the power of human conception and could only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude. . . . there is one absolute Reality which antecedes all manifested, conditioned, being. This Infinite and Eternal Cause—dimly formulated in the “Unconscious” and “Unknowable” of current European philosophy—is the rootless root of “all that was, is, or ever shall be.” It is of course devoid of all attributes and is essentially without any relation to manifested, finite Being. It is “Be-ness” rather than Being . . . (SD I, 14)

The ABSOLUTE; the Parabrahm of the Vedantins or the one Reality, SAT, which is, as Hegel says, both Absolute Being and Non-Being. (SD I, 16)

This is the limitless, eternal, unqualified principle. If we desire to call it God, we may do so but then we are no longer speaking about the God of the theistic religions, hence this Principle is never called God in the *Secret Doctrine*. Its closest equivalents would be Parabrahm of the Vedantists, the Ain of the Kabbalist, the Absolute of Hegel. All the other beings, whether Logos, Elohim, Brahma, Jehovah, Dhyān Chohans, archangels, etc. would be in the realm of the manifested, hence limited. They have beginnings and thus have endings.

Within or in this Absolute there is an eternal principle that manifests and unmanifests. In its unmanifested state it is called the First Logos in the *Secret Doctrine*. In its manifested state it is called the Third Logos. The state between the 1st and 3rd Logos is the intermediate 2nd Logos. Only the third Logos is the creative deity, from which emanates all the things in the universe. It is a principle and not a kind of personal God that most people imagine God to be.⁸

This concept of a transcendent deity beyond God is not alien to Christianity. It has been taught in the 5th century by Dionysius the Areopagite in his *Divine Names*, by Meister Eckhart in his *Sermons*, and by others. Below are their statements:

Meanwhile, I beseech you by the eternal and imperishable truth, and by my soul, consider; grasp the unheard-of. God and Godhead are as distinct as heaven and earth. Heaven stands a thousand miles above the earth, and even so the Godhead is above God. God becomes and disbecomes. Whoever understands this preaching, I wish him well. But even if nobody had been here, I must still have preached this to the poor-box. (Meister Eckhart, quoted by Aldous Huxley, in *The Perennial Philosophy*, p. 38)

The Godhead is pre-eminent above, and surpasses every power, howsoever being and conceived. (*Dionysius the Areopagite, Divine Names, Caput VIII, sect 1*)

The idea of Godhead in Christianity does not fully measure up to the Absolute of Blavatsky and the Parabrahm of the Vedantists, but it recognizes the limitation of the manifested God or Gods. Dionysius' *Celestial Hierarchy* recognizes too the hierarchy of divine beings from the highest Seraphims to the lowest angels, which brings us to the following statements of the letter of the Mahatma:

⁸ *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. 1, p. 16, “Proem.”

We know there are planetary and other spiritual lives We believe in Dhyanis, or Planetaries . . .

Historical gods, that is, beings or deities that may actually manifest or intervene in human affairs, when they are genuine and are not the products of fear or a fertile imagination, belong to the hierarchy of spiritual intelligences above human beings, but they are not the highest God itself. Such spiritual beings may be visible or invisible, may be discarnate or incarnate, may be powerful or full of wisdom, but they all have limitations. They are far from the omniscient, omnipotent or omnipresent God that religions idealize in their doctrines. This is true whether we speak of Jehovah, Elohim, Jesus, Allah, Buddha, etc.

Ignorance created Gods and cunning took advantage of the opportunity. Look at India and look at Christendom and Islam, at Judaism and Fetichism. It is priestly imposture that rendered these Gods so terrible to man; it is religion that makes of him the selfish bigot, the fanatic that hates all mankind out of his own sect without rendering him any better or more moral for it. It is belief in God and Gods that makes two-thirds of humanity the slaves of a handful of those who deceive them under the false pretence of saving them. It is not man ever ready to commit any kind of evil if told that his God or Gods demand the crime — voluntary victim of an illusionary God, the abject slave of his crafty ministers? The Irish, Italian and Slavonian peasant will starve himself and see his family starving and naked to feed and clothe his padre and pope. For two thousand years India groaned under the weight of caste, Brahmins alone feeding on the fat of the land, and to-day the followers of Christ and those of Mahomet are cutting each other's throats in the names of and for the greater glory of their respective myths. Remember the sum of human misery will never be diminished unto that day when the better portion of humanity destroys in the name of Truth, morality, and universal charity, the altars of their false gods.

We are not Adwaites, but our teaching respecting the one life is identical with that of the Adwaites with regard to Parabrahm

... According to Mr Massey's philosophical conclusion *we have no God?* He is right - - since he applies the name to an extra cosmic anomaly, and that we, knowing nothing of the latter, find each man his God -- within himself in his own personal, and at the same time *impersonal* Avalokiteshvara. (Letter 113, p 390)

The next letter on the subject that the Mahatma KH wrote to Hume is Letter 90, where he wrote:

There are some modern philosophers who would prove the existence of a Creator from motion. We say and affirm that that motion — the universal perpetual motion which never ceases, never slackens nor increases its speed, not even during the interludes between the pralayas, or “nights of Brahma”, but goes on like a mill set in motion whether it has anything to grind or not (for the pralaya means the temporary loss of every form, but by no means the destruction of cosmic matter which is eternal) — we say this perpetual motion is the only eternal and uncreated Deity we are able to recognise. To regard God as an intelligent spirit, and accept at the same time his absolute immateriality is to conceive of a nonentity, a blank void; to regard God as a Being, an Ego and to place his intelligence under a bushel for some

mysterious reasons — is most consummate nonsense; to endow him with intelligence in the face of blind brutal Evil is to make of him a fiend — a most rascally God.

A Being however gigantic, occupying space and having length breadth and thickness is most certainly the Mosaic deity; “No-being” and a mere principle lands you directly in the Buddhistic atheism, or the Vedantic primitive Acosmism. What lies beyond and outside the worlds of form, and being, in worlds and spheres in their most spiritualized state — (and you will perhaps oblige us by telling us where that beyond can be, since the Universe is infinite and limitless) is useless for anyone to search after, since even Planetary Spirits have no knowledge or perception of it. If our greatest adepts and Bodhisattvas have never penetrated themselves beyond our solar system, — and the idea seems to suit your preconceived theistic theory wonderfully, my respected Brother — they still know of the existence of other such solar systems, with as mathematical a certainty as any western astronomer knows of the existence of invisible stars which he can never approach or explore. (Letter 90, 280)

And we maintain that wherever there is life and being, and in however much spiritualized a form, there is no room for moral government, much less for a moral Governor — a Being which at the same time has no form nor occupies space! (Letter 90, p. 281)

So how do the Mahatmas explain the existence of evil? The same letter explains this point, and further makes an important comment on why failure to understand this basic teaching on the existence prevents Hume from going further into the mysteries of nature:

And now to your extraordinary hypothesis that Evil with its attendant train of sin and suffering is not the result of matter, but may be perchance the wise scheme of the moral Governor of the Universe. Conceivable as the idea may seem to you, trained in the pernicious fallacy of the Christian, — “the ways of the Lord are inscrutable” — it is utterly inconceivable for me. Must I repeat again that the best Adepts have searched the Universe during milleniums and found nowhere the slightest trace of such a Machiavellian schemer — but throughout, the same immutable, inexorable law. You must excuse me therefore if I positively decline to lose my time over such childish speculations. It is not “the ways of the Lord” but rather those of some extremely intelligent men in everything but some particular hobby, that are to me incomprehensible. As you say this need “make no difference between us” — personally. But it does make a world of difference if you propose to learn and offer me to teach. For the life of me I cannot make out how I could ever impart to you that which I know since the very A.B.C. of what I know, the rock upon which the secrets of the occult universe, whether on this or that side of the veil, are encrusted, is contradicted by you invariably and a priori. My very dear Brother, either we know something or we do not know anything. In the first case what is the use of your learning, since you think you know better? In the second case why should you lose your time? You say it matters nothing whether these laws are the expression of the will of an intelligent conscious God, as you think, or constitute the inevitable attributes of an unintelligent, unconscious “God,” as I hold. I say, it matters everything, and since you earnestly believe that these fundamental questions (of spirit and matter — of God or no God) “are admittedly beyond both of us” — in other words that neither I nor yet our greatest adepts can know any more than you do, then what is there on earth that I could teach you?

This view on God is reflected and summarized in H. P. Blavatsky's *The Key to Theosophy*:

ENQUIRER. Do you believe in God?

THEOSOPHIST. That depends what you mean by the term.

ENQUIRER. I mean the God of the Christians, the Father of Jesus, and the Creator: the Biblical God of Moses, in short.

THEOSOPHIST. In such a God we do not believe. We reject the idea of a personal, or an extra-cosmic and anthropomorphic God, who is but the gigantic shadow of *man*, and not of man at his best, either. The God of theology, we say -- and prove it -- is a bundle of contradictions and a logical impossibility. Therefore, we will have nothing to do with him.

ENQUIRER. State your reasons, if you please.

THEOSOPHIST. They are many, and cannot all receive attention. But here are a few. This God is called by his devotees infinite and absolute, is he not?

ENQUIRER. I believe he is.

THEOSOPHIST. Then, if infinite -- *i. e.*, limitless -- and especially if absolute, how can he have a form, and be a creator of anything? Form implies limitation, and a beginning as well as an end; and, in order to create, a Being must think and plan. How can the ABSOLUTE be supposed to think -- *i. e.*, to have any relation whatever to that which is limited, finite, and conditioned? This is a philosophical, and a logical absurdity. Even the Hebrew Kabala rejects such an idea, and therefore, makes of the one and the Absolute Deific Principle an infinite Unity called Ain-Soph. In order to create, the Creator has to become active; and as this is impossible for ABSOLUTENESS, the infinite principle had to be shown becoming the cause of evolution (not creation) in an indirect way -- *i. e.*, through the emanation from itself (another absurdity, due this time to the translators of the Kabala) of the Sephiroth.

ENQUIRER. Then you are Atheists?

THEOSOPHIST. Not that we know of, and not unless the epithet of "Atheist" is to be applied to those who disbelieve in an anthropomorphic God. We believe in a Universal Divine Principle, the root of ALL, from which all proceeds, and within which all shall be absorbed at the end of the great cycle of Being.

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