

The Secret Doctrine Symposium

Compiled and Edited
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Introduction

In creating this course, it was the compiler's intention to feature some of the most compelling and insightful articles on *The Secret Doctrine* published in Theosophical journals over the past several decades. Admittedly, the process of selecting a limited few from the large number available is to some extent a subjective decision. One of the criteria used for making this selection was the desire to provide the reader with a colorful pastiche of commentary by respected students of Theosophy, in order to show the various avenues of approach to Mme. Blavatsky's most famous work.

The sequence of the articles in the Symposium was arranged, not chronologically, nor alphabetically by author, but thematically and with an eye to a sense of balance. While some of the articles are informational, there are also those that are inspirational, historical, and instructional. It is hoped that the Symposium will encourage, inspire, and motivate the student to begin a serious and sustained exploration of this most unusual and important Theosophical work.

Questions have been added to each of the articles. When referring to a specific quote or passage within the article, the page number and paragraph are referenced. For instance, (1.5) indicates the fifth paragraph on page one; (4.2) indicates the second paragraph on page four. A page number followed by a zero, *i.e.*, (25.0) would indicate that something is being discussed in the paragraph carried over from the previous page, in this case, page 24.

A few words on the editing process are in order: British spelling and punctuation have been changed to the American style; citations from various editions of *The Secret Doctrine* now refer to the 3-volume 1979 edition by the Theosophical Publishing House; in keeping with modern standards, the language has been edited, where possible, to be more gender neutral, but not at the sacrifice of good prose; and minor emendations have been made throughout as necessary. The compiler alone is responsible for any errors of judgment in the editing of these articles.

—David P. Bruce
September 2011

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The Magic of *The Secret Doctrine*

By George Arundale

Adapted from a lecture given at the 1934 Summer Convention at Olcott and later published in the December 1934 and January 1935 issues of *The American Theosophist*.

Being at the present moment an officer of the Theosophical Society, naturally I have had to plumb down into the depths of that movement, at the heart of which is the book called *The Secret Doctrine*. It is my personal belief that no one can be truly effective in the Theosophical Society unless they have had an acquaintance at least with the spirit of *The Secret Doctrine*. It is quite idle for an individual to think that they can give the very soul of our Theosophical science unless they have performed that Yoga which brings them into touch with the most remarkable book of our age.

I encourage you to enter into the spirit of this book far more than into the letter of it, because unless you have the higher consciousness very considerably developed along very many different lines, it is impossible to enter into a realization of all that *The Secret Doctrine* conveys.

But if you will endeavor to sense it, to contact it—not with the emotions, not with the mind, but with the will (since *The Secret Doctrine* is a First Ray book), you will be able to gain immense wisdom from it, which should be able to change the whole of your attitude toward life and your understanding of it.

In setting forth the dominant values of *The Secret Doctrine*, there are certain ones that stand out. In the first place, it sets forth in non-dogmatic and non-rigid language the fundamental principles of existence, which are at the root of all religions, philosophies, and sciences throughout the world.

Secondly, *The Secret Doctrine* does not claim to be revolutionary. It denies specifically that it is a religion or some new truth given out for the first time. It is a transmission from above and not a groping or discovery from below; that is the wonder about this book, which makes it entirely unique. There is hardly any book written which does not give you a sense of a groping from below, of an endeavor of something small to reach after something large. But when you come into contact with *The Secret Doctrine* you see at once that there is a transmission from above, not a revelation. There is quite a distinction to be drawn between the two, and in the case of *The Secret Doctrine* you feel that in every page there is a breathing down of something which comes from above.

One of the supremely arresting intimations of *The Secret Doctrine* is the spirit of mountains which scintillates from every page. As we read it, we know we are in the midst of Himalayan splendors; we perceive overwhelming heights and distances round about us, of structure and substance altogether incomprehensible to us, yet strangely akin. We have the

sense of being infinitely small, yet we somehow perceive that the infinitely great is the inevitable extension of ourselves.

In the preface of *The Secret Doctrine*, HPB says that she now transmits that which she has received, and finally adds, as to those who reject her testimony: they will be as right in their way in denying, as she is right in hers in affirming, since they look at Truth from two entirely different standpoints. How can Western scholars accept on hearsay that which they know nothing about?

You are right to deny whatever you like, and I know that these fundamental principles are largely obscure even to the eager reader, endowed though he may be with the pomp and circumstance of modern wisdom. Thus the student must of necessity discover for himself at every stage of his study. There is not a single page or a single statement in *The Secret Doctrine* which can be understood as it is, but if you will take that page and examine it with your will, examine it with an open mind and a desire to discover what it means, you will find that you are able to contact an aspect of your individuality which probably has escaped you heretofore.

The study of *The Secret Doctrine* is an experiment in Yoga. I have read it fairly thoroughly, but not for the purpose of understanding what she is saying by following sentence after sentence, page after page. It is impossible to do that because *The Secret Doctrine* is not sequential in any sense of the term. On every page you will find a darting about from one subject to another and a use of the same terms in entirely different senses, so that from the standpoint of the lower mind you may become annoyed and feel impelled to say: "I wish that HPB would write clearly so that I might understand." But the fact is that she does not wish to write clearly. She wants to write obscurely, so that the individual, who is trying to find out, does try to find out, and asks: "What does it mean? Where are we going with such a phrase? What is she really trying to say?"

People often talk about how they would like to develop higher consciousness. This can be achieved but only through long and persistent effort. One of the very best methods of gaining higher consciousness is to study *The Secret Doctrine*, and to try to understand that which is expressly intended, so to speak, to be un-understandable.

The Secret Doctrine is a challenge to effort and never an imposition of authority. Every page is a call to a voyage of discovery; only those who embark upon this voyage can hope to begin to understand the book. In many books, in many teachings, things are put down dogmatically—"Do this, do that, do the other," with a cut and dried science of life. There is nothing cut and dried about the science of life as depicted in *The Secret Doctrine*. There is nothing said about this book being the only book, or about these teachings being true and other teachings being false. This is a book which demands a pioneering spirit, an adventurous spirit, a spirit of indifference to the persecution of the small-minded. It demands the spirit of those who have left behind them all attachment to numbers, to crowds, to

orthodoxies, and seek beyond all these the companionship of the few and the compelling call of the unknown.

In other words, *The Secret Doctrine* set is a *vade mecum* for the larger consciousness of each one of us, and this is one of the reasons why so many have no use for it—their higher faculties are asleep and in no condition to awaken.

As a Theosophist, you must be able to make your plans for yourself, and make those plans far beyond the gateway of death. Death comes to you merely as an incident through which you must pass, for it leads you into a newer and, let us hope, fuller life. So let us plan not for today, not for tomorrow, not for any particular period of years, not even for any particular time, but for eternity, and then face life from that point of view.

Another aspect of *The Secret Doctrine* is this—there is no *consummatum est* to be spoken. There is no end. You apparently go on and on. People sometimes think, “How fatiguing to go on and on.” But it is not fatiguing when you realize the end in the means. For every means, however, is no less an end in itself, and so you live for the moment and combine such living with living in the eternal.

As you become acquainted with *The Secret Doctrine*, you begin to realize that you cannot really understand it unless you have left behind your personal attachments to the things of this world—things that may be necessary for each one of us at a particular stage of evolution, but which must eventually be outgrown. If you can learn to identify far more to the eternal and far less to time, then *The Secret Doctrine* becomes indeed a revelation, a great lighthouse upon your way.

One subtle aspect of *The Secret Doctrine* is the extraordinary way in which the pendulum swings on every page between the most emphatic personality and the most aloof impersonality. There is a supreme scope for the individual as a separate, unique person. But there is simultaneously with that, at every step of the enfoldment of that definite personality, an extraordinary sense of refuge in an all-powerful impersonality in which, as it were, that personality upon which you have been so rightly insisting loses itself in the immensities of the Real.

And so the swing of the pendulum alternates between the individual person and the greater whole of which we are all a part, so that you never lay too much stress upon yourself, since there is always the recurring movement into the vastness of which each one of us, at the present moment, is but a faint expression.

What we have to do is to try to sense the reality behind the words or phrases. I do not think HPB always knew what she was writing when she was working on this book, but she wrote, as it were, in a condition of Yoga, just as the Bhagavad Gita was given forth in a condition of Yoga. We have to make that higher Yoga an assured fact, to meet it by lower Yoga, in order to make the essential contact which will overcome the limitations of language.

Speaking for myself, there is any amount of *The Secret Doctrine* which is truly incomprehensible to me, but at the same time there are passages which correspond to my own experience and to my own understanding, and so I say to myself: "Well, those things I do not understand at all, but this, yes, this I do, and perhaps I shall some day understand a little more, and so I am going on for that!"

HPB must needs be obscure, but in that obscurity lies much of her power and much of our own freedom. A book which is perfectly clear is generally a book which, at best, tells us where we are and not whither we must go. And just now, perhaps at all times, the whither matters far more than the where. *The Secret Doctrine* is like a lighthouse far away, sending forth beams of light into the darkness. We see the light, and it inspires us to tread the way. But we must move ourselves, for we are the travelers.

It is for that reason that I am sometimes just a little bit nervous about classes in *The Secret Doctrine*, because I am always afraid of a purely intellectual point of view being taken, so that the whole spirit and soul and larger reality of the book escapes attention. It is not a book intended for classes, but a book more for spiritual enlightenment and individual study. Those who have studied it from the higher standpoint are certainly more competent to give Theosophy to the world than those who have not, because their higher consciousness has been developed.

Most of us want to understand at every stage, want to be able to pass judgment at every point and to say, "Yes, I see but I am not prepared to follow what I do not see." What we need are more Theosophists in the world who are not particularly interested in following what they see, but who are eager to follow what they do not see; who are adventurous, who can voyage forth on the discovery of life, as Colonel Olcott voyaged forth, not knowing whether he would get anywhere.

Finally, I should like to make it clear that you can take up the study of *The Secret Doctrine*, and study it quite profitably, without feeling that you have understood it. It stretches and expands your consciousness so that you are able to approach various problems of your own life, and of others, with a consciousness that has been widened through contact with this very great work, the greatest work which has been given to the world for centuries, and yet a book which is largely ignored even by earnest Theosophists at the present time.

The Secret Doctrine gives us a very wonderful sense of purpose, taking us out of time and giving us part of its essential mystery; one begins to realize that one incarnates with a purpose, and then nothing whatever can take away our abiding sense of happiness.

George S. Arundale was the international president of the Theosophical Society from 1934 – 1945.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: (References to article are by page and paragraph.)

1. What is the difference between a revelation and “a transmission from above”? (1.5)
2. Arundale suggests that some readers may become frustrated or annoyed (2.3) when they attempt to read *The Secret Doctrine*. Have you ever had this experience? Did Arundale make any statements or offer any suggestions that might help you to overcome these very common reactions to a most difficult work?
3. How do you feel about the Theosophical idea that there is no end to life? (3.3) Does it give you hope? Does it make you weary? Consider why you have either of those reactions.
4. Ponder the curious statement that much of HPB’s power lies in her obscurity, while at the same time that obscurity can be the source of our freedom. (4.2)

EXCERPTS FROM *THE SECRET DOCTRINE* —

These truths are in no sense put forward as *a revelation*; nor does the author claim the position of a revealer of mystic lore, now made public for the first time in the world’s history. —Preface [vol. 1, p. vii]

To my judges, past and future, therefore—whether they are serious literary critics, or those howling dervishes in literature who judge a book according to the popularity or unpopularity of the author’s name, who, hardly glancing at its contents, fasten like lethal *bacilli* on the weakest points of the body—I have nothing to say. Nor shall I condescend to notice those crack-brained slanderers—fortunately very few in number—who, hoping to attract public attention by throwing discredit on every writer whose name is better known than their own, foam and bark at their very shadows. —Introductory [vol. 1, p. xlv]

But to the public in general and the readers of *The Secret Doctrine* I may repeat what I have stated all along, and which I now clothe in the words of Montaigne: Gentlemen, “I HAVE HERE MADE ONLY A NOSEGAY OF CULLED FLOWERS, AND HAVE BROUGHT NOTHING OF MY OWN BUT THE STRING THAT TIES THEM.” Pull the “string” to pieces and cut it up in shreds, if you will. As for the nosegay of FACTS—you will never be able to make away with these. You can only ignore them, and no more.” —Introductory [vol. 1, p. xlvi]

“Every reader will inevitably judge the statements made from the standpoint of his own knowledge, experience, and consciousness based on what he has already learnt. . . . Thus, the *Past* shall help to realize the PRESENT, and the latter to better appreciate the PAST. The errors of the day must be explained and swept away, yet it is more than probable—and in the present case it amounts to certitude—that once more the testimony of long ages and of history will fail to impress anyone but the very intuitional—which is equal to saying the very few. —Ibid.

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H. P. Blavatsky Brings to Mankind the Light of the Timeless Wisdom

By Alfred Taylor

Published in the 1969 Spring issue of *The American Theosophist*.

In all ages there are those who, with little fanfare and though little known, bring to bear powerful influences on human affairs. An outstanding example of such a relatively silent force in our civilization is exemplified in the life and works of H. P. Blavatsky. Her contribution has certainly been little recognized; nevertheless, there is evidence that the ideas she introduced to the modern world toward the end of the nineteenth century are slowly but persistently permeating human thought and viewpoints.

Mme. Blavatsky did not bring something new to mankind. In fact, her offering was something very old. She succeeded in the great task of communicating wisdom as ancient as mankind. Her first serious work, *Isis Unveiled*, was published in 1877. This extensive introduction to esoteric philosophy accomplished several important objectives. In the first place, it served to expose the irrationality that permeated prevailing theologies and, at the same time, revealed the doctrine of materialism as equally realistic. The result was to invite the wrath of the followers of both these opposite fields of dogma or belief. *The Secret Doctrine*, H. P. Blavatsky's major work, was published in 1888. These two publications, *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, gave to the world as much of the Ageless Wisdom as seemed wise at the time they were published. In addition to these two comprehensive works, she also translated an ancient teaching under the title of *The Voice of the Silence*. This little book, first published in 1889, is deeply occult and mystical in nature, but carries the same metaphysical message as does *The Secret Doctrine*. It has attracted many readers and is still widely read. It is reported that a copy of *The Voice of the Silence* was on the bedside table of the poet Lord Tennyson at the time of his death.

The Secret Doctrine contains the most comprehensive account of esoteric wisdom, or Theosophy, available to the public. The preparation of the work was a most difficult task, since the author not only had the responsibility of explaining Theosophical concepts and principles as clearly as possible, but also had the further assignment of demonstrating the presence of this wisdom in religion, philosophy, science, and other fields of knowledge. This involved deep appreciation and understanding of wide areas of human thought and investigation. Also, it was necessary for the author to be able to penetrate to the inner meanings of various religious scriptures, myths, and legends.

Blavatsky spent many years in intensive study and contemplation under the guidance of Master Teachers in training for her life's work. In addition, she was unusually gifted with

intuition, high intelligence, and the capacity for vivid, exquisite communication of metaphysical ideas.

At the time Mme. Blavatsky gave to the world her illuminating works on Theosophical philosophy, materialism was well entrenched in the Western world among scientists, philosophers, and leaders of thought. At the same time, another segment of the public was being swayed by primitive religious dogmas. Theosophy gave to the few independent minded people an alternative to the deadly, depressing, materialistic doctrine, and the even more pernicious insults to reason of the prevailing theologies. With Theosophy, the aspirant for understanding was introduced to a wisdom in accord with the basic principles of all the great religions, as well as the data of science. Further, the Ageless Wisdom provided a realistic, undogmatic approach to truth, free from authoritarianism and self-evident as it was understood.

Throughout past ages, Theosophical teachings have helped people to solve the problems inherent in human life. And since these teachings are founded upon realities within us, around us, and in our experience, they are timeless truths. Those who have been able to respond to the Ageless Wisdom have experienced a transformation into more vital, effective, and confident living. However, in our modern world there are few who seek this knowledge, though the need for it is very great. Why is this so? The answer seems to be that most people are unable to throw off established ideas and beliefs to which all of us are subjected during a lifetime. Added to this type of conditioning is the fact that throughout the human history, there has always been a drift toward a materialistic viewpoint of man and nature. This is to be expected since the world we contact through our sense organs seems so real, so vivid, that we tend to accept it as it appears. We note this tendency for forms and appearances to become over-emphasized among the followers of both religion and science. Among Christian beliefs, the Christ principle becomes identified with a particular individual, and the birth of the Christ consciousness has become the birth of a baby. Also, Western funeral procedures reveal underlying tendencies to associate a person with the physical body. Even in Buddhism, the statues of the physical form of the Buddha tend to become more important than the teachings. The same materialistic trend is present in all religions.

In our modern civilization, the brilliant achievements in the field of science have made a tremendous impression on most people. As a result, world opinion has been influenced by the viewpoints and ideas expressed by scientists and materialistically leaning philosophers. When we add to this the fact that scientific research is conducted strictly on an empirical basis, we can appreciate the reason for the current dominance, not only of materialism, but of materialism with a scientific flavor. It is this attitude that now prevails, and because it is linked with the brilliant achievements in the field of science it is a most powerful influence on human thinking.

In order to evaluate the importance of H. P. Blavatsky's contribution to humanity, it is necessary to identify some of the basic assumptions of materialism and to compare them with a few of the concepts set forth in *The Secret Doctrine*. Then we can decide for ourselves the relative merits of these completely opposite approaches to the understanding of ourselves and the world around us. We can note how each harmonizes with reason, intuition, and experience.

Modern materialism is based upon a few relatively simple principles. The main idea, of course, is that the reality of beings and things is matter or energy. A human being is the physical body. Thoughts and emotions arise from actions and reactions in the cells, tissues, organs, and systems that make up the body. According to the materialistic viewpoint, there is nothing other than matter or energy as the ultimate reality of a human being.

Certain consequences are implicit in the materialistic model. The universe is assumed to have evolved from a space-time continuum as the source of all that is. And since brain tissue had not evolved in the unruffled, or unevolved, space-time continuum, no mind or intelligence was present. The unthinkably complex world of the present is believed to have evolved by chance or by the random play of forces inherent in the original energy sources. Today, there are chemical elements and compounds, planetary systems, plants, animals, and human beings. According to the materialistic hypothesis, all this vast accumulation of meaningful organizations has developed by accidental actions and reactions. There is no instance in human experience of order issuing from no order on the basis of the accidental, mindless play of forces, but the principle of "evolution by chance" is vital to materialism.

The basic principles set forth in *The Secret Doctrine*, as they relate both to us and to nature, are also quite simple. The reality from which all has evolved is an unknowable Absolute, "an Immutable Principle on which all speculation is impossible." From this Absolute emerges Spirit, or Pre-Cosmic Ideation, and Pre-Cosmic Root-Substance. The combination of these two aspects of the Absolute results in the evolvment of the universe. The present universe is one of an endless series of universes, which emerge from and are reabsorbed by the Absolute. All nature, including our own cycle of rest and activity, reflects this sequence of action and inaction. "The Secret Doctrine teaches the progressive development of everything, worlds as well as atoms; and this stupendous development has neither conceivable beginning nor imaginable end. Our 'Universe' is only one of an infinite number of Universes, all of them 'Sons of Necessity,' because links in the great Cosmic chain of Universes, each one standing in the relation of an effect as regards its predecessor, and of a cause as regards its successor."¹

Cosmic Ideation is channeled through Beings evolved in past universes, who *will* a new universe, sound the keynote of what it is to be, and work through myriads of lesser intelligences to bring the Word, or keynote, into manifestation. The concepts and principles set forth in *The Secret Doctrine* are revealed in human experience. This is true because the human being is a reflection of the total reality. "The Universe is worked and *guided* from

within outwards. As above, so it is below, as in heaven so on earth; and man—the microcosm and miniature copy of the macrocosm—is the living witness to this Universal Law and to the mode of its action.”²

The unreality of materialism becomes evident when we really appreciate human affairs. All human productions are a combination of ideation and the material necessary for their manifestation. The simplest example of this is a written message or a book. The physical book serves to manifest ideas which are not in space or time but require a material form for their communication from one person to another. The physical book wears out in time and finally ceases to exist, yet the message it conveys is not affected by the passage of the years. We note the same principle where a machine such as an automobile is concerned. The car grows old, disintegrates, and is scrapped, but the plan or design remains unaffected by time and can be embodied in a new model. The evolution of the automobile since its appearance about the beginning of the twentieth century is in accord with the evolution of plants, animals, and human beings. The inventor worked out a plan and built a car to its specifications. Then as a result of experience with this kind of machine, the plan was improved and used for the construction of better models. In this way, automotive engineers gradually evolved the present cars. In the process, car design, or the blueprint, has been passed through millions of car bodies.

In these areas of human production, the fact that the physical form serves as a means of manifestation of thought or ideation is beyond question. But what about living organisms? Here again, as with human constructions, there is the plan, or design, which is brought into manifestation through physical matter. An acorn carries oak tree information for the tremendous complication of development, growth, and maintenance of the tree form. If we dissect an acorn, there is no evidence of a tree in it, just as there is no trace of an automobile in a set of automobile blueprints. In both instances the physical manifestation embodies a particular ideation. The same is true for the germ cells of all living forms in relation to the plant or animal forms that develop from them.

Human beings proceed through the spiritual qualities of will, wisdom, and intelligence in all our works. We first will to do something, next we determine what it shall be, and finally, by intelligent effort we materialize our thought or ideation. The outer form is a necessary part of the process of bringing an idea into its practical application, but it is a secondary value, just as the paper and ink of a letter are secondary to the message it carries. All human constructions are materialized thought. The reality of a machine, a cathedral, a symphony, is in that which is contributed by mind or intelligence. If the plan of a house were to be removed there would remain a meaningless pile of materials. The same is true for all meaningful forms.

The Secret Doctrine extends this principle, so evident in human affairs, to the entire universe. “The one prevailing, most distinct idea—found in all ancient teaching, with

reference to Cosmic Evolution and the first ‘creation’ of our Globe with all its products, organic and *inorganic*—is that the whole Kosmos has sprung from the DIVINE THOUGHT.”³

The question arises: why, then, are not all the affairs of nature characterized by perfection? The Plan comes forth from Universal Mind in completeness, but it comes into manifestation through the cooperation of evolving intelligences that only gradually learn how to carry out the work. A musician may have before him a musical composition of great perfection and value, yet he must spend much time in practice before he can begin to bring out its real merit as he plays it on his musical instrument.

In a brief paper, only a few of the ideas that characterize *The Secret Doctrine* can be considered, but enough has been given, perhaps, to reveal that it is in accord with reason, intuition, and above all, with human experience. The table below may be helpful in clarifying a few of the fundamental differences that exist between the hypotheses of materialism and those of *The Secret Doctrine*, or Theosophy.

Materialism	The Secret Doctrine
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Universe has evolved from One Source the unruffled space-time continuum, or more specifically, electromagnetic energy. 2. The One Source of the Universe, electromagnetic energy, is lifeless, and evolution began in the absence of will, wisdom, or intelligence. 3. Since there was no intelligence in existence when the universe began, evolution began and continued on the basis of accidental or chance actions and reactions in matter and energy. 4. Man and all other living forms are the physical bodies we perceive through the sense organs. Everything in the Universe can be reduced to matter or energy. 5. Biological evolution has proceeded on the basis of chance changes, or mutations, in the germ cells. These changed germ cells resulted in variations in the adult forms that developed from them. The principle of natural selection eliminated some of these adult forms and preserved others. In this way have evolved environmental adaptations and new species, culminating in man. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Universe has evolved from One Source, the Absolute, which works through its two aspects, Pre-Cosmic Ideation and Pre-Cosmic Substance. 2. All that exists is a manifestation of the One Life, or Spirit, and evolution began and has continued through will, wisdom, and intelligence. 3. Since this universe is one of an endless series, Intelligences from previous evolutions were present to will, plan, and guide its beginning and continuance. 4. Every meaningful form is an embodied Plan or Soul. This is true even for atomic and subatomic matter. Hence, it follows that the total universe can be resolved into thought, ideation, or spirit. 5. A living form is essentially soul and body. The body evolves in accordance with the inner urge of the soul to fulfill its place in the Divine Plan of the Universe. Natural selection and gene mutation are secondary to the power and purpose of the Divine Plan that permeates every manifestation.

In her writings, H. P. Blavatsky has brilliantly put forth truths that are in accord with reason, intuition, and human experience—truths which form the heart of all the great religions and which are implicit in nature, as revealed through the facts and principles of science. Ever since its publication, *The Secret Doctrine* has been a source of inspiration and

information to a growing number of seekers for understanding. In spite of numerous attempts to discredit the work by slanderous attacks upon its author, its influence on world thought has steadily increased. Through this wisdom, the aspirant for truth receives illuminating insights into basic realities of man and nature. Furthermore, these teachings do not rest upon authority, since they are self-evident as they are understood. In the light of *The Secret Doctrine*, modern materialistic concepts are recognized as crude dogmas unrelated to the facts of science and to ordinary human experience.

Invisible currents of thought shape the destinies of mankind. Today, the doctrine of materialism hangs like a cloud over human hopes and aspirations. But in the present, as in the past, the power of truth quietly and persistently forces its way ever deeper into human consciousness. This has been the experience of humanity throughout history, as the seemingly enduring misconceptions of one age are forgotten in succeeding eras. In bringing to the modern world the realism and the light of the timeless wisdom, H. P. Blavatsky has made a monumental contribution to the progress of human enlightenment and welfare. She has reactivated ideas that are cleansing the mind of humanity of the superstitions that are now, in this age, the main source of human misery and desolation, and at the same time giving to mankind growing confidence in itself and in the universe.

Alfred Taylor, M.A., Ph.D., before his retirement in 1965 as head of cancer research in the Biochemical Institute of the University of Texas, had published more than a hundred articles in the fields of science and philosophy. He was a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and of the New York Academy of Science, and a member of the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine.

References

1. Blavatsky, H. P. *The Secret Doctrine*. Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House 1979, vol. 1, p. 43.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 274.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: (References to article are by page and paragraph.)

1. What evidence is there that the ideas put forth in *The Secret Doctrine* continue “permeating human thought and viewpoints?” (7.1)
2. In what sense is Theosophy free from authoritarianism? (7.2) Do not speakers and writers often quote Blavatsky? Does not the fact that HPB is often quoted make her a kind of authority?
3. “In our modern world there are few who seek this knowledge [the Ageless Wisdom], though the need is very great.” (8.2) The author gives his explanation as to why this is the case. Can you think of any other reasons?
4. The subtitle of *The Secret Doctrine* reads as follows: “The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy.” What is the fundamental way each of these disciplines leads to truth? How is a synthesis of diverse elements different from a combination of those elements?
5. What is the difference between pure science and “materialism with a scientific flavor”? (8.3)
6. In his book *The God Delusion*, atheist Richard Dawkins says, “Let children learn about different faiths, let them notice their incompatibility, and let them draw their own conclusions about the consequences of that incompatibility.” As a Theosophist, what would you say to young children about the differences between religions?
7. “Atheism is more than just the knowledge that gods do not exist, and that religion is either a mistake or a fraud. Atheism is an attitude, a frame of mind that looks at the world objectively, fearlessly, always trying to understand all things as a part of nature.” How would you respond to this statement by the cosmologist Carl Sagan? What might a mind that “looks at the world objectively” be missing?

EXCERPTS FROM *THE SECRET DOCTRINE* —

It is abundantly clear that *The Secret Doctrine* is actually a great deal more than just an explanation of, and a running commentary on, certain Stanzas translated from the *Book of Dzyan*. Throughout its pages there are a great many passages which begin with such expressions as: “Occultism teaches,” “the Secret Doctrine states,” “the Esoteric Philosophy affirms,” “Occult Science declares,” etc., etc., followed by a succinct exposition of certain occult truths expressed in direct and unequivocal language. When such passages are linked together, it becomes obvious that *The Secret Doctrine*, in its essential framework, is a comprehensive outline of the heretofore, secret science or philosophy of occultism, publicly given out by two or more Initiates of the Brotherhood of Adepts through the intermediary of their direct messenger, H. P. Blavatsky. — Historical Introduction (1:73-4)

It should of course be distinctly borne in mind that *The Secret Doctrine* outlines but a small portion of that universal occult tradition which in H. P. B.’s own words is “the accumulated Wisdom of the Ages.” It is but the lifting of a corner of the mystic veil which hides the higher degrees or levels of this knowledge. (ibid. p. 75]

Nature behaving *in actu* ever esoterically, and being, as the Kabalists say, *in abscondito*, can only be judged by the profane through her appearance, and that appearance is always deceitful on the physical plane. (1:610)

The exact extent, depth, breadth, and length of the mysteries of Nature are to be found only in Eastern esoteric sciences. So vast and so profound are these that hardly a few, a very few of the highest Initiates—those *whose very existence is known but to a small number of Adepts*—are capable of assimilating the knowledge. Yet it is all there, and one by one facts and processes in Nature’s workshops are permitted to find their way into the exact Sciences, while mysterious help is given to rare individuals in unraveling its arcana. (1:611-12)

No more than Science, does esoteric philosophy admit *design* or “special creation.” It rejects every claim to the “miraculous,” and accepts nothing outside the uniform and immutable laws of Nature. But it teaches a cyclic law, a double stream of force (or spirit) and of matter, which, starting from the *neutral centre* of Being, develops in its cyclic progress and incessant transformations. (2:731)

ACTION ITEMS

- Read the Preface to *The Secret Doctrine*. What are the main points that Blavatsky makes?
- Using the index of *The Secret Doctrine*, look up references to the word “materialism.”

THE MAKING OF *THE SECRET DOCTRINE*

By Michael Gomes

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While most Theosophists are familiar with the fact that H. P. Blavatsky's magnum opus, *The Secret Doctrine*, was published in 1888, and are aware of the vast theories of cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis contained therein, the events which shaped the making of this book are not as well known. Fortunately a number of eyewitness accounts have survived, making it possible to reconstruct this period. The most fascinating and detailed is Countess Wachtmeister's *Reminiscences of H. P. Blavatsky and The Secret Doctrine* published in 1893 after HPB's death.

The blond, blue-eyed Countess was a society woman who was born in Florence, Italy, on March 28, 1838. In 1863 she married her cousin, the Count Karl Wachtmeister, who was then stationed in London as the Swedish and Norwegian minister to the Court of St. James. Subsequently they lived in Copenhagen where he was minister to the Danish court, and in Stockholm, where he was named minister of foreign affairs. After his death in 1871 she developed an interest in spiritualism. But like many titled members of the early Theosophical Society, her spiritualism soon developed into occultism. Her reading *Isis Unveiled* led her to join the British T.S. in 1880.¹

It was at the London home of the popular Theosophical author, A. P. Sinnett, early in April 1884 that Countess Wachtmeister first met HPB, who had come over briefly from Paris for the elections of the London Lodge. The Countess saw Mme. Blavatsky later that spring at the chateau of the Count and Countess d'Adhemar at Enghien, France, before returning to Sweden, and was told by HPB that "before two years had passed, I would devote my life wholly to Theosophy,"² which at the time, she says, she regarded as an utter impossibility.

When Countess Wachtmeister again contacted HPB at the beginning of December 1885, the situation was a very different one from the brilliant receptions of London and Paris, which had culminated with a gala farewell for Colonel Olcott and Mme. Blavatsky at Prince's Hall in London on July 21, 1884, attended by 500 people in evening dress. "It's not life," HPB had written to her sister Vera, "but a sort of mad turmoil from morning till night. Visitors, dinners, evening callers, and meetings every day."³ But now the Theosophical leader was in disgrace, "abandoned by all and deserted." Letters attributed to her in the September and October 1884 *Madras Christian College Magazine* seemed seriously to compromise her phenomena, as had her failure to prosecute for libel, and her sudden leaving of India in March 1885 for Europe. An agent had been sent by the newly-formed

London Society for Psychical Research to investigate the matter, and his report to be issued soon was generally believed to be unfavorable.⁴

The Countess had intended to spend the winter of 1885/86 in Italy, and had stopped en route at the home of a fellow T. S. member and student of the occult, Marie Gebhard in Elberfeld, Germany. Mme. Gebhard, who had been one of the few private pupils of the French Kabbalist, Eliphas Levi, urged her guest to see HPB who was now settled in nearby Würzburg. Mme. Blavatsky's response was a polite refusal claiming lack of space and time to entertain a visitor, as she was engaged in writing *The Secret Doctrine*. But as the Countess was preparing to leave for Rome, and the cab was actually at the door, a telegram arrived saying, "Come to Würzburg at once, wanted immediately—Blavatsky."⁵

Because of the rumors of fraud and deception circulating about Blavatsky, Countess Wachtmeister says she could not help being on her guard as she climbed the steps of No. 6 Ludwigstrasse in Würzburg on the evening of her arrival. She found an unhappy 54 year-old woman who was smarting sensitively under insults and suspicions, and who embarrassingly told her that she had not initially invited the Countess because the small size of her apartment—mainly a bedroom, dining room, sitting room, and maid's quarters—might not satisfy someone of her guest's background.

Countess Wachtmeister must have been a remarkably unpretentious person for she stayed with Mme. Blavatsky for the next five months. A screen had been bought which separated the bedroom to provide their only private space. At six in the morning their Swiss maid, Louise, would bring a cup of coffee for HPB, who then rose and dressed and was at her writing desk by seven. Breakfast was at eight when the day's mail would be read, and then Mme. Blavatsky would return to her writing. Their main meal was served at one in the afternoon, but when the Countess rang the hand bell, sometimes HPB might not respond for hours, depending how well her writing was going. Finally, at seven she put it aside, and after tea, the two of them would spend a "pleasant evening together," HPB amusing herself with a game of patience, while the Countess read her passages and articles from the daily journals. By nine HPB retired to bed where she would read the Russian newspapers late into the night.

They had few visitors at this time, the regularity of their days punctuated only by the weekly visit of HPB's doctor who usually stayed an hour, and an occasional appearance by their landlord. Most of HPB's time was spent working on her new book which had been advertised in the *Journal* of the Society early in 1884 as a "new version of *Isis Unveiled* with a new arrangement of the matter, large and important additions, and copious notes and commentaries." But the work had gone slowly. An attempt at grouping subjects exists from HPB's 1884 European tour, and before the arrival of the Countess she had managed to put together a few chapters.

Like Colonel Olcott's testimony for HPB's writing *Isis Unveiled*, and Annie Besant's on the production of *The Voice of the Silence*, Countess Wachtmeister's account tallies with

the depiction of HPB being able to sit for long hours and write continuously, stopping only to gaze into vacant space. HPB explained her technique as being able to “make what I can only describe as a sort of a vacuum in the air before me, and fix my sight and my will upon it, and soon scene after scene passes before me like the successive pictures of a diorama, or, if I need a reference or information from some book, I fix my mind intently, and the astral counterpart of the book appears, and from it I take what I need. The more perfectly my mind is freed from distractions and mortifications, the more energy and intentness it possesses, the more easily I can do this.”⁶

But soon the peaceful atmosphere which the Countess had managed to create by relieving HPB from concern about the running of the household was shattered in a most dramatic way. On New Year’s Eve 1885 a member of the Germania T. S., Prof Sellin, appeared with the finally published report by Richard Hodgson for the Society for Psychical Research Committee on theosophical phenomena in which the Committee had judged her worthy of permanent remembrance as “one of the most accomplished, ingenious and interesting imposters in history,”⁷ and Hodgson had added his own conclusion that she had done it all as a cover for her being a Russian spy!

“I shall never forget that day,” the Countess records in her *Reminiscences*, “nor the look of blank and stony despair that she [HPB] cast on me when I entered her sitting room and found her with the open book in her hands.” In the intensity of the moment HPB turned on her, shouting, “Why don’t you go? Why don’t you leave me? You are a Countess, you cannot stop here with a ruined woman, with one held up to scorn before the whole world, one who will be pointed at everywhere as a trickster and an imposter. Go before you are defiled by my shame.”⁸

The Countess did not go; instead she stayed on, not only through this crisis, but until HPB’s death in 1891. Her presence did much to alleviate HPB’s suffering, and her personal integrity must be counted towards influencing HPB’s later acceptance by London society. This is something HPB herself acknowledged, for in writing to a T. S. member in India, she says, “The widow of the Swedish ambassador in London, the ex-visitor at all hours of the Queen, and one who is known in London for twenty years in the highest circles as a woman of unblemished reputation and one who has never uttered a falsehood in her life, is not likely to throw her reputation, her friends and position, to become the most devoted champion of an HPB, if there was nothing serious in it.”⁹

Still, they had a terrible time as Countess Wachtmeister’s letters to A. P. Sinnett in London show. “We have had a terrible day and the Old Lady wanted to start to London at once,” she wrote him on the evening of January 1, 1886.¹⁰ The Countess had finally managed to calm HPB down, who wanted to write a number of indignant protests to all concerned, and who in her excited state had developed palpitations of the heart, which required a dose of digitalis. The following days brought rude letters and resignations as the contents of the S.P.R. Report became known, until, the Countess says, “my heart used to

sink every morning, when the postman's ring was heard at the thought of the fresh insults which the letters would surely contain."¹¹

"We are having a horrible time of it here," she informed Sinnett on January 4th. "I thought Madame would have had an apoplectic fit—but fortunately a violent attack of diarrhea saved her, but I weary of it all so much."¹² The Countess reports how HPB "felt herself deserted by all those who had professed such devotion for her. As she pathetically said one day: 'If there was only one man, who had the courage to come forward and defend me as he would his own mother, if thus scurrilously attacked, the whole current of the Theosophical Society would be changed.'" It was a critical moment for the Society, and HPB was left alone in her agony and despair.¹³

Out of this crucial testing period came the nucleus of *The Secret Doctrine* as we know it. The book would no longer simply be a revision of an earlier work, but something HPB felt would serve as her vindication by answering the charges against her. Accordingly, she wrote to the president of the Society on January 6th: "*Secret Doctrine is entirely new.* There will not be there 20 pages quoted by bits from *Isis*. New matter, occult explanations—the whole Hindu Pantheon explained, based on exoteric translations (to be easily verified) and explained esoterically proving Xty and every other religion to have taken their dogmas from India's oldest religion. . . . In *four* Parts—Archaic, Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Periods. Each Part 12 chapters, with Appendices and a Glossary of terms at the end. Countess here, and she sees I have almost *no* books. Master and Kashmiri dictating in turn. She copies all. This *will* be my vindication, I tell you."¹⁴

Here perhaps is the great lesson of the writing of *The Secret Doctrine*. Here was someone whose world was crumbling around her, who had worked for a decade to see the Society that she had helped start almost destroyed, to be socially ostracized, shunned, and dropped by friends and acquaintances. How did she react? Did she give up, as many others might have, defeated? No. She turned on her critics by producing a book containing one of the most complete outlines of physical and spiritual evolution of her century. A book that has survived a hundred years and that is read around the world.

When HPB returned to the writing of *The Secret Doctrine* at the start of February 1886, it was with a grim determination that would carry her through the next two years, and which would triumph over death itself. By the end of the month, she had completed 300 foolscap pages of a preliminary volume that would show "what was known historically and in literature, in classics and in profane and sacred histories—during the 500 years that preceded the Christian period and the 500 years that followed it" of the existence of a "Universal Secret Doctrine," and would serve as an introduction to her translation of the Stanzas of Dzyan.¹⁵

As the rent on the apartment at Würzburg was only paid up until April 15th, HPB decided to pass the summer months at Ostende on the Belgian seacoast. Her sister Vera and a niece would stay with her, allowing the Countess the chance to return to Sweden to settle

her affairs there. An English member, Miss Emily Kislingbury, whose affiliation with the Society went back to 1876, would travel with HPB till Ostende. But when they arrived at Cologne to change trains and rest for the day, Gustav Gebhard persuaded HPB to pay a brief visit to his family in Elberfeld. It was there that she slipped and sprained her leg, which postponed her leaving till July accompanied by her sister and niece.

She arrived in Ostende at the height of the season to find everything overpriced. With the help of her sister she managed to find a suite of rooms, first at No. 10 Boulevard Van Isgham, and later at No. 17 Rue d'Quest, where, reunited with the Countess, she passed the winter. The regularity of their Würzburg days was repeated, the monotony broken only by a few more visitors, the English seer, Anna Kingsford, and her uncle, Edward Maitland; Sinnett gathering material for his proposed biography of HPB; Arthur Gebhard and Mohini Chatterji, who spent their time "studying 'Bhagavad Gita' all day;"¹⁶ the Rev. A. Ayton; and K. F. Gaboriau from France.

A copy of the MS. of the finished preliminary volume of *The Secret Doctrine* was given to Marie Gebhard to send to Colonel Olcott from Elberfeld, but she kept it for a month and it did not reach him in India until December 10th. This volume was to be the introductory section to the "real pukka S. D." volume of the Archaic Period with the seven stanzas of Dzyan and the commentaries on them. "It is an absolutely necessary one," HPB informed Olcott, "otherwise if they began reading the Archaic Vol., the public would get crazy before five pages, *too metaphysical*."¹⁷

The Countess had been sent to London to attend to a business matter there, and HPB passed the New Year into 1887 alone. "The 2nd anniversary in exile and for what guilt or fault, ye Gods," she wrote to an American member. "Ah, life is a hard thing to bear."¹⁸ It was at this time that she made the following important decision about her future. "Either I have to return to India to die this autumn, or I have to form between this and November next a nucleus of true Theosophists, a school of my own. . . . I can stop here, or go to England, or whatever I like," she revealed to Countess Wachtmeister.¹⁹

Perhaps it was just coincidental, but after the Countess's return, HPB began receiving letters from a small group of members of the London Lodge who still met on a regular basis, and who wrote her for advice on the best way of carrying on the work. Dr. Archibald Keightley, who with his uncle Bertram, had joined the Society in 1884, was deputed by this group personally to invite HPB to come over to England where she could spend the summer. Since Countess Wachtmeister had to go to Sweden that summer to dispose of property there to enable her to live with HPB on a more permanent basis, the move was decided upon.

A departure date of March 27th had been set, but on the 17th of the month HPB uncharacteristically lost consciousness in her armchair after dinner. Then she developed a cold, and on the fifth day of her illness, the doctor diagnosed uremic poisoning due to inaction of the kidneys. The Countess says she became alarmed when HPB began to drift

into “a heavy lethargic state, she seemed to be unconscious for hours at a time, and nothing could rouse or interest her.”²⁰

Madame Gebhard had come from Elberfeld so that in shifts someone would always be in attendance with HPB, and as their local doctor could get no results, Countess Wachtmeister telegraphed Dr. Ashton Ellis, a member of the London group of Theosophists, to send over a specialist. Dr. Ellis replied that he would come immediately, and upon arrival prescribed a program of massage to stimulate the paralyzed organs, which he proceeded to do for the next three days.

As there seemed to be no improvement to HPB’s condition, Mme. Gebhard suggested that her will be made out, for if she died intestate in a foreign country there would be no end of complications. So a lawyer, the doctor, and the American Consul were to come the next day. During that night’s watch the Countess says, “To my horror I began to detect the peculiar faint odour of death which sometimes precedes dissolution. I hardly dared hope that she would live through the night.”²¹

HPB was anxious about the fate of the manuscript of *The Secret Doctrine*, and gave the Countess instructions to send it to Colonel Olcott at Adyar to have it printed. She said she was glad to die after what she had suffered in the last years. She drifted into unconsciousness, and as the night passed seemed to grow weaker by the hour. The strain of the last few days was such that the Countess says a “wave of blank despondency” swept over her and she too drifted off.

Morning light was already streaming in when Countess Wachtmeister opened her eyes. Her first thought was that HPB might have died as she slept. Instead she found an alert and awake HPB who told her that during the night she had the choice of being able to die or finish *The Secret Doctrine*. “But when I thought of those students to whom I shall be permitted to teach a few things, and of the Theosophical Society, in general, to which I have already given my heart’s blood, I accepted the sacrifice.”²²

It was a joyous group that the lawyer found when he arrived to make the will later in the day. The Belgian doctor kept repeating, “But she should be dead . . . she should be dead,” and the American Consul, who had come as a witness, left with the words, “Well, I think this is enough fatigue for a dying woman,”²³ and the little party laughed heartily over the events of that day’s turnaround.

The Countess looked so used up that Mme. Gebhard suggested that she leave for Sweden at once, and offered to stay until the Keightleys came to take HPB to London. In spite of bad weather, the crossing to Dover was without incident, though everyone was concerned for HPB, who had not left her heated rooms for weeks. She was housed at “Maycot,” a small cottage in Upper Norwood, with Mabel Collins, a member of the London group, on May 1st, and before the day’s end was back at work with *The Secret Doctrine*.

During Countess Wachtmeister's absence in Sweden throughout the summer of 1887, the narrative for the making of *The Secret Doctrine* is continued by the accounts of two young Cambridge graduates, Archibald (1859–1930), and his uncle, Bertram Keightley (1860–1945). By the end of May, Bertram Keightley could write to W. Q. Judge, General Secretary of the newly formed American Section, and editor of the New York *Path*, that “HPB is fairly well and working away right hard at *The Secret Doctrine*, which is *awfully* good, and I am sure you will be immensely pleased with it.”²⁴

Soon after her arrival at Maycot, HPB passed her MS., which was now over three feet high, over to the Keightleys “to read, punctuate, correct the English, alter, and generally treat as if it were our own.”²⁵ Their summer was spent “reading, rereading and copying.” *The Secret Doctrine*, as it came to be published, dates from this time, for it was the Keightleys' suggestion that “instead of making the first volume to consist, as she had intended, of the history of some great occultists, we advised her to follow the natural order of exposition, and begin with the Evolution of Cosmos, to pass from that to the Evolution of Man, then to deal with the historical part in a third volume treating of some Great Occultists; and finally, to speak of Practical Occultism in a fourth volume, should she ever be able to write.”²⁶

The material was then rearranged under the headings of Cosmogogenesis and Anthropogenesis with the stanzas of Dzyan and her commentaries leading off each volume, followed by explanations of the symbolism and science treated therein. The thing that impressed the Keightleys was the paucity of Mme. Blavatsky's personal library. Archibald, who had made the transit with her from Ostende and who had helped her unpack, states: “I knew there was no library to consult and I could see that HPB's own books did not amount to thirty in all, of which several were dictionaries and several works counted two or more volumes.”²⁷ Yet the manuscript edited by them for the press quoted or referred to over 1300 books. The checking of the sources alone occupied a group of people, including E. Douglas Fawcett, assistant editor of the London *Daily Telegraph*, Richard Harte, a member from America, and it was even rumored, S.L. Macgregor Mathers, who was regularly seen at the British Museum poring over old folios of Cabalistic lore.

Concurrent with the editorial work on *The Secret Doctrine* were a series of events which revived Theosophical work in England. The Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society (still in existence) was formed May 19 with ten members; by the second meeting a week later it was decided to publish a magazine that would bring Theosophical ideas to a larger public, and The Theosophical Publishing Company was started to manage this. By the time Countess Wachtmeister arrived in England in August, a three story brick building had been leased at 17 Lansdowne Road in London to serve as a residence for the Theosophical household.

The Secret Doctrine was to be issued by the London publisher George Redway, with whom A. P. Sinnett had invested in, but after a disagreement on terms, the work was taken

over by The Theosophical Publishing Society and the release date of October 27, 1888 set. An advance copy of the first volume (723 pp.) exists bearing the notation by Richard Harte that he received it at Lansdowne Road from the printer on October 20th as he was leaving for India with Colonel Olcott. The first edition of 500, bound in light grey, and bearing the dedication “to all True Theosophists, in every Country and of every Race,” sold out immediately, going mainly to subscribers, and a second edition was printed before the end of the year.²⁸ With the publication of the book, Countess Wachtmeister closes her *Reminiscences* with the words: “HPB was happy that day.”²⁹

In comparison to *Isis Unveiled*, *The Secret Doctrine* was not as widely reviewed by the press, though *The Theosophist* reprinted notices from such diverse sources as the *Memphis Appeal*, the New Orleans *Southland*, and the London *Secular Review*. Such was the prejudice against the movement at the time that the New York *Evening Telegram* published a review based only on the prospectus sent out four months before the actual release date. The *Telegram* reported: “Mme. Blavatsky is undoubtedly an intellectual phenomenon, but because she can soar back into the Brahmin ignorance of the Buddhists and furnish Edwin Arnold with food for thought is no proof that everything she says is true . . . Ten minutes of Edison and Noah Webster will do more for civilization than all the fine spun immoralities of the Indian poets. However it is a good thing to study history, and Mme. Blavatsky, with her learning and patience throws the light of her intellectual dark lantern on the monstrosities of the past. Her book is very elaborate and comprehensive in its scope, and will undoubtedly be widely read.”³⁰

Perhaps the most influential review appeared in London’s literary *Pall Mall Gazette*. The anonymous reviewer’s closing remarks serve as a fitting conclusion to the making of *The Secret Doctrine* and an introduction to the book itself. “Mme. Blavatsky’s views may not meet with acceptance, but they are supported by sufficient learning, acuteness and ability to enforce a respectful hearing. It is indeed the East which, through her, challenges the West, and the Orient need not be ashamed of its champion.

“The book deserves to be read: it deserves to be thought over; and none who believe in the progress of humanity has the right to turn away over-hastily from any contribution to knowledge, however new its form, from any theory, however strange its aspect. The wild dreams of one generation become the commonplaces of a later one . . .”³¹

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2. Wachtmeister, Countess Constance. *Reminiscences of H. P. Blavatsky and The Secret Doctrine*. (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1893, reprinted Wheaton: Quest Books, 1976, p. 9.
3. HPB to Vera Zhelihovsky, July 1884. The *Path*, N.Y. June 1895, pp. 74-77.
4. For background on this incident see my article, "The Coulomb Case, 1884-1984." in *The Theosophist*, Dec. 1984, Jan., Feb., 1985.
5. Wachtmeister. *Op. cit.*, p. 12.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
7. S.P.R. *Proceedings* 3 (1885): 202.
8. Wachtmeister. *Op. cit.*, p. 18.
9. HPB to Judge N. D. Khandalavala, July 12, 1888, T. S. Archives, Adyar. "She would never consciously tell an untruth," remembers another member of the London household, James Pryse, *Canadian Theosophist*, June 15, 1932, p. 126.
10. In *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*, [LBS] p. 270. Letter CXXVI.
11. Wachtmeister, "A New Year's Greeting," *The Vahan*, London, January 1, 1891, and *Theosophical Siftings*, 3:17, p. 3.
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13. Wachtmeister, *H.P.B. and the Present Crisis in the Theosophical Society*, privately printed, London, c. 1895, p.6.
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16. *LBS*, p. 217. Letter XCVII.
17. HPB to HSO, September 23, 1886. *The Theosophist*, March 1925, p. 789.
18. HPB to Elliott Coues, dated by her "between 1886-1887." *The Canadian Theosophist*, Nov.-Dec. 1984, p. 116.
19. *Reminiscences* pp. 54-55.
20. *ibid.* p. 59.
21. *ibid.* p. 60.
22. *ibid.* p. 62.
23. *ibid.* p. 64.
24. Letter of May 29, 1887, quoted in Kirby van Mater's "The Writing of *The Secret Doctrine*." *Sunrise*, November 1975, p. 60.
25. B. Keightley, "Writing of *The Secret Doctrine*." in *Reminiscences*, p. 78.
26. B. Keightley in *Reminiscences*, p. 79. In addressing the December 1890 Adyar T. S. Convention he revealed that "what would now be the 3rd volume was to have been the first volume...."
27. A. Keightley, "Writing of *The Secret Doctrine*," in *Reminiscences*, p. 84. Marion Meade in her biography *Madame Blavatsky*, 1980, p. 380, notes, "In fact, every person involved with Madame Blavatsky during the writing of *The Secret Doctrine* seems to have gone out of their way to mention the curious lack of reference works." They were genuinely impressed by it.
28. Harte's copy with the October 20, 1888, notation on the flyleaf now in the Boris de Zirkoff Collection at the Olcott Library, Wheaton, formerly belonged to the Blavatsky Association in London. The note is transcribed in de Zirkoff's exhaustive presentation of the writing of *The Secret Doctrine, Rebirth of the Occult Tradition* (Adyar: T.P.H., 1977), p. 1. A copy of the second edition inscribed December 7, 1888, and presented "to the Adyar Library by its most devoted and humble servant, H. P. Blavatsky," exists in the Adyar Archives.

29. *Reminiscences*, p. 72.
30. N.Y. *Evening Telegram*, June 30, 1888, "Words with Wings."
31. *Pall Mall Gazette*, April 25, 1889, p. 3. "Among the Adepts."

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: (References to article are by page and paragraph.)

1. What sacrifices and risks did the Countess Wachtmeister take on in order to assist the work of HPB and Theosophy?
2. H. P. Blavatsky had to endure many trials and tribulations before she finished *The Secret Doctrine*. How did the way she responded to these difficulties reveal her human as well as a heroic side?
3. Can you find the one paragraph in this article where the author steps out of his objective role as historian and reveals his personal opinion of HPB?
4. The author describes several remarkable and mysterious occurrences which defied ordinary explanations and for which an occult or paranormal explanation seems more appropriate. What were those instances?
5. What does the New York *Evening Telegram* review of *The Secret Doctrine* indicate about the prevailing attitudes of the cultural elites at that time? (22.1)
6. Speculate why the *Pall Mall Gazette* review was published anonymously. (22.2)
7. Before it was published, *The Secret Doctrine* went through three conceptual stages of development. Describe the three stages.
8. What unique talent did H. P. Blavatsky have that made her a fitting instrument for the writing of *The Secret Doctrine*? In terms of writing skills, what ability did she lack that resulted in her needing assistance from other Theosophists?

EXCERPT FROM *THE SECRET DOCTRINE* —

Esoteric philosophy reconciles all religions, strips every one of its outward, human garments, and shows the root of each to be identical with that of every other great religion. It proves the necessity of an absolute Divine Principle in nature. It denies Deity no more than it does the Sun. Esoteric philosophy has never rejected God in Nature, nor Deity as the absolute and abstract *Ens*. It only refuses to accept any of the gods of the so-called monotheistic religions, gods created by man in his own image and likeness, a blasphemous and sorry caricature of the Ever-Unknowable.

—Introductory [vol. 1, p. xx]

THE SOURCES OF *THE SECRET DOCTRINE*

By Boris de Zirkoff

Published in the 1969 Spring issue of *The American Theosophist*.

It is a well-known fact that *The Secret Doctrine*, H. P. Blavatsky's *magnum opus*, is partially based upon a number of stanzas translated by her from the *Book of Dzyan*. As a term, *Dzyan* is simply the Tibetan and Mongolian way of pronouncing the Sanskrit term *Dhyana*, which means meditation or contemplation. As a book or manuscript, it is an integral part of a well-known, more or less common, Tibetan series of works called by the general title of *Kiu-ti*. According to HPB's own statement, there are some thirty-five volumes of *Kiu-ti* of an exoteric character for the use of the layman, and these may be found in the library of almost any Tibetan monastery. There are also fourteen books of commentaries and annotations on the same by initiated Teachers.

The exoteric portion of the *Kiu-ti* series is full of myths, blinds, and legendary material as is the case with popular beliefs all over the world. The fourteen volumes of commentaries, however, with an ample glossary of occult terms, contain a digest of all the occult sciences and are derived from "one small archaic folio, the *Book of the Secret Wisdom of the World*." The exoteric volumes of *Kiu-ti* are comparatively modern, having been edited within the last millennium, while the earliest volumes of the commentaries are of untold antiquity. Their relation to the exoteric books is somewhat similar to the relation between the Jewish *Qabbalah* and the so-called Mosaic Books.

The *Book of Dzyan*, which is the first volume of the commentaries upon the seven secret folios of *Kiu-ti*, while recent in its physical form, is extremely ancient in regard to its substance, as the teachings contained therein go back into Atlantean times and beyond. It deals mainly with the cosmogonic building of the worlds, of our own planetary chain of globes especially, and with the appearance and development of humanity through the various Root-Races and Rounds. It is definitely stated by HPB that she is using only excerpts from certain stanzas and that her translation of these is made from Chinese, Tibetan, and Sanskrit translations of the original Senzar commentaries and glosses on the *Book of Dzyan*.

To limit oneself, however, to the *Book of Dzyan* as the chief source of *The Secret Doctrine* would be somewhat one-sided and therefore incomplete. HPB's monumental work is not a mere translation of ancient passages, with her own commentaries and explanations thereof. A considerable part of her two volumes¹ was produced in quite a different manner and originated from another yet co-related source. In order to understand the situation, it is necessary to consider some of HPB's characteristics as an occultist, and to bear in mind the ancient esoteric doctrine of *Tulku*. This technical Tibetan term (Sanskrit

equivalent being *Avesha*) describes the condition when a living Initiate sends a part of his consciousness to take embodiment, for a longer or shorter period of time, in a disciple or chela whom that Initiate sends into the outer world to perform a duty or to teach. The chela then acts as a transmitter of the spiritual powers of the Initiate. H. P. Blavatsky acted frequently throughout her public career as the temporary *tulku* of one or another Adept or Initiate of the Trans-Himalayan Brotherhood. *Tulku* is performed without loss of consciousness and with definite and complete knowledge of what is taking place, the occultist maintaining his self-conscious awareness at all times, and merely lending his astrophysical organism to the temporary usage of a higher consciousness by mutual consent. *Tulku* stands at the opposite pole from mediumship, and is one of the powers acquired as a result of occult training. Other powers, developed by means of extremely arduous, severe and strenuous occult discipline, are spiritual clairvoyance and clairaudience, powers which stand in relation to their psychic equivalents as the brightness of the noonday sun stands to the pale and deceptive moonlight.

When these facts are taken into serious consideration, it becomes easier to understand how HPB produced some of the most outstanding passages of *The Secret Doctrine*. Considerable portions thereof were dictated to her by one or another Adept, not as an employer would dictate to his secretary, but by direct transference of ideas from one mind to another in the condition of *tulku*. Other portions are descriptions by HPB of what her trained spiritual consciousness actually *saw* in the akashic records marshaled before it. These indelible records were either evoked by her own powerful will, or unfolded under the superior will of the Adepts, in those cases when she was unable to do it herself. Still other portions of the manuscript were precipitated by one or another of the Initiates she was working under, and worked over by her, edited, rearranged and incorporated into her work.

It was not for the first time that these circumstances were taking place. They were, to some extent, and most likely to a greater extent, the repetition of what occurred in connection with the writing of *Isis Unveiled* some ten years previously.

Writing from Würzburg to A. P. Sinnett in November, 1885, HPB says:

I am very busy on *Secret D*. The thing at N.Y. is repeated—only far clearer and better. I begin to think it *shall vindicate* us. Such pictures, panoramas, scenes, *antediluvian* dramas and all that! Never saw or heard better . . .²

Writing from the same city to Dr. Franz Hartmann in December, 1885, she says:

Now, as you know, I also am occupied with my book. It took possession of me (the epidemic of writing) and crept on “with the silent influence of the itch,” as Olcott elegantly expresses it—until it reached the fingers of my right hand, got possession of my brain—carried me completely into the region of the occult. I have written in a fortnight more than 200 pages (of the *Isis* shape and size). I write day and night, and now feel sure that my *Secret Doctrine* shall be finished this—no, no, not this—year, but the next . . .³

Writing again to A. P. Sinnett on March 3, 1886, she explains:

There's a new development and scenery, every morning. I live two lives again. Master finds that it is too difficult for me to be looking consciously into the astral light for my S.D. and so, it is now about a fortnight, I see large and long rolls of paper on which things are written and I recollect them. Thus all the Patriarchs from Adam to Noah were given me to see—parallel with the Rishis; and in the middle between them, the meaning of their symbols—or personifications . . .⁴

Writing from Würzburg to W. Q. Judge on March 24, 1886, she tells him:

I want you badly for the arrangement of *Secret Doctrine*. Such facts, *such facts*, Judge, as Masters are giving out will rejoice your old heart . . .⁵

In a letter received by Countess Constance Wachtmeister from Dr. William Hubbe-Schleiden, who visited HPB at Würzburg in the early part of 1886, he says:

In many respects her work was then carried on in a very similar way to that which Col. Olcott describes in Chapter XIII of his *Old Diary Leaves* . . . I also saw her write down sentences as if she were copying them from something before her, where, however, I saw nothing. . . . I saw a good deal of the well-known blue K.H. handwriting as corrections and annotations on her manuscripts as well as in books that lay occasionally on her desk.

And I noticed this principally in the morning before she had commenced to work. I slept on the couch in her study after she had withdrawn for the night, and the couch stood only a few feet from her desk. I remember well my astonishment one morning when I got up to find a great many pages of foolscap covered with that blue pencil handwriting lying on her own manuscript, at her place on her desk. How these pages got there I do not know, but I did not see them before I went to sleep and no person had been bodily in the room during the night, for I am a light sleeper.⁶

Early in January, 1886, Dr. Hubbe-Schleiden, after leaving HPB on his last visit to her in Würzburg, found in his copy of Richard Hodgson's *Report* a precipitated letter signed by Master K.H. The last sentence of it said that "the undersigned is happy to assure him that *The Secret Doctrine* when ready, will be the triple production of M., Upasika and the Doctor's most humble servant." Upasika stands for HPB and means female disciple or chela.

Together with this letter there was another one signed by Master M. which stated: "If this can be of any use or help to Dr. Hubbe-Schleiden—though I doubt it—I, the humble under-signed Fakir certify that the 'Secret Doctrine' is dictated to Upasika partly by myself and partly by my Brother K.H."

In the well-known letter from Master K.H. which Col. Henry S. Olcott phenomenally received on board the P. & O. Mail Steamer *Shannon*, August 22, 1888, the day before he arrived at Brindisi, occurs the following passage:

I have also noted your thoughts about the ‘Secret Doctrine.’ Be assured that what she has not *annotated* from scientific and other works, we have given or *suggested* to her. Every mistake or erroneous notion, corrected and explained by her from the works of other theosophists *was corrected by me, or under my instruction*. It is a more valuable work than its predecessor, an epitome of occult truths that will make it a source of information and instruction for the earnest student for long years to come.⁷

From the various documents quoted above, it is abundantly clear that *The Secret Doctrine* is actually a great deal more than just an explanation of, and a running commentary on, certain stanzas translated from the *Book of Dzyan*. Throughout its pages there are a great many passages which begin with such expressions as: “Occultism teaches,” “The Secret Doctrine states,” “the Esoteric Philosophy affirms,” “Occult Science declares,” etc., etc., followed by a succinct exposition of certain occult truths expressed in direct and unequivocal language. When such passages are linked together, it becomes obvious that *The Secret Doctrine*, in its essential framework, is a comprehensive outline of the heretofore secret science or philosophy of occultism, publicly given out by at least two Initiates of the Brotherhood of Adepts through the intermediary of their direct messenger, H. P. Blavatsky.

Its text contains several different yet interrelated levels, from the scientific arguments and philosophical dissertations of H. P. Blavatsky as a student of mystical lore, to the inspired ideas, penetrating thoughts, and prophetic statements of an initiated occultist—HPB, and beyond these, to the lofty pronouncements and stirring passages directly derivative from the minds of Higher Occultists and which, at times, resound like the peal of organ music in the vastness of space. Unless this complex scheme of the work is grasped, the real nature of *The Secret Doctrine* will not be understood.

Some students, impressed by the vast amount of collateral information contained in this work, and dealing mainly with supporting evidence drawn from various religions, philosophies, and mythologies the world over, have imagined *The Secret Doctrine* to be a syncretistic work wherein a multitude of seemingly unrelated teachings and ideas are cleverly woven together to form a more or less coherent whole. Nothing could be farther from truth than this erroneous conception.

HPB’s *magnum opus* is intended to present a wholly coherent outline of an ageless doctrine, a system of thought based upon occult facts and universal truths inherent in nature and which are as specific and definite as any mathematical proposition. The teachings of that system as a whole cannot be deduced from, or found in, any of the known exoteric religious or philosophical schools of ancient or more recent times, although separate ideas and single tenets can be occasionally found, or at least hinted at, in the works of ancient writers, suggesting the existence of a parent doctrine carefully hidden from view.

The stupendous Cosmogogenesis and Anthropogenesis presented for our consideration and study are completely *sui generis*; they are not copied from any of the world-scriptures, nor

are they pieced together from a number of them. They challenge investigation as the most extraordinary literary problem of our age. Unless HPB's own explanation concerning their source is accepted, no other explanation is of the slightest value.

Already as early as 1883, HPB, while discussing various conflicting views about Buddhism on the part of Western scholars, took occasion to point out that:

The only way in which they will solve the problems raised, will be by paying attention to the direct teachings of *The Secret Doctrine* which are now being given out to the world through the columns of this Magazine [*The Theosophist*] for the first time in the history of the subject.⁸

The Secret Doctrine is the first major work in *several thousand years* which is intended to, and actually does, outline in a consecutive and coherent manner the foundation-principles of that universal occult doctrine—the *Brahma-Vidya*, the *Gupta-Vidya*, the *Gnosis Pneumatikos*—which was the original knowledge of the *Manasaputras*, who brought it to nascent mankind in this Round and left it in the care of its then highest exponents as a perennial fountainhead of spiritual truths.

It should of course be distinctly borne in mind that *The Secret Doctrine* outlines but a small portion of that universal occult tradition which in HPB's own words is "the accumulated Wisdom of the Ages." It is but the lifting of a corner of the mystic veil which hides the higher degrees or levels of this knowledge. Hence it would be foolish for anyone to imagine that HPB's work is the last word of that knowledge, while it is but the general outline of some of the basic principles thereof.

In the light of existing evidence, both published and traditional, it is therefore obvious that the principal sources of *The Secret Doctrine*—and this applies to many other portions of HPB's literary output—are collectively the Brotherhood of Adepts whose direct messenger she was, and individually two or more of the Initiates belonging to this Brotherhood, and who chose to unveil in our present era a certain portion of their traditionally hidden knowledge for the benefit of those who were ready to receive it.

The vehicle—man-made and therefore imperfect—which was to serve for the widespread dissemination of these truths was The Theosophical Society, founded in 1875 on direct orders of the Brotherhood. In spite of its many failures and shortcomings, its present fragmentation and disunity, it still remains, as an overall movement, the best exponent in this world of ignorance and confusion, of the ageless teachings of the *Gupta-Vidya*. To be true to its original intent, faithful to its foundation-principles and pregnant with truth for the sake of the future, it is imperative that it should preserve inviolate that body of "direct teachings of *The Secret Doctrine*" which have been entrusted to its care by the real Founders of the movement—the Adepts of the Trans-Himalayan Brotherhood. We as students and workers in that movement have a duty to perform, and a mandate to carry out, namely, to preserve the purity of that system of thought and the coherence of that body of teachings which have been handed down to us as a spiritual heritage by those who

chose to place them into our hands. Unless we do this and do it wholeheartedly, cautiously and wisely, the organized Theosophical Movement will come to an untimely end, swamped by vague generalizations, comfortable assumptions, psychic visions and wishful speculations, while the main current of esotericism finds inevitably another and purer channel for its powerful flow.

The future of the Theosophical Movement depends upon its spiritual integrity, its vital sense of brotherhood, its unclouded occult intuitions and its unshakable moral strength. If we live up to these ideals and attend to our sacred duties, then, indeed:

In Century the Twentieth some disciple more informed, and far better fitted, may be sent by the Masters of Wisdom to give final and irrefutable proofs that there exists a Science called *Gupta-Vidya*; and that, like the once-mysterious sources of the Nile, the source of all religions and philosophies now known to the world has been for many ages forgotten and lost to men, but is at last found.⁹

Boris de Zirkoff was a native of Russia where he received his early education. After the revolution, he studied in various European universities, specializing in languages and the classics. Emigrating to the United States, he went directly to the headquarters of the Point Loma Theosophical Society, where he worked for eighteen years in literary, scholastic, and secretarial capacities, under both Katherine Tingley and Dr. G. de Purucker. He is the compiler of H. P. Blavatsky's *Collected Writings*. Mr. de Zirkoff was the grand-nephew of H. P. Blavatsky.

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2. *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*. Transcribed, compiled and with an Introduction by A. Trevor Barker. New York; Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1924. Letter No. CXVI, p. 244.
3. *The Path*, New York, Vol. X, January, 1896, pp. 299–300
4. Barker, *op. cit.*, Letter No. LXXX, p. 194.
5. Wachtmeister Countess Constance, *Reminiscences of H.P. Blavatsky and "The Secret Doctrine."* London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1893, p. 101.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 112–13.
7. *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*. Transcribed and compiled by C. Jinarajadasa, Fourth Edition. Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1948. Letter No. 19.
8. *The Theosophist*, vol. IV, May, 1883, p. 182.
9. *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. I, p. xxxviii

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: (References to article are by page and paragraph.)

1. What is meant by the esoteric doctrine of Tulku? (25.4)
2. Describe how Tulku differs from mediumship. (26.0)
3. In his article, “The Magic of *The Secret Doctrine*,” George Arundale characterized *The Secret Doctrine* as “a transmission from above.” How does Boris de Zirkoff’s article shed further light on that description?
4. In referring to the contents of *The Secret Doctrine*, what does Boris de Zirkoff mean by “collateral information”? (28.4)
5. Why is it inaccurate to characterize HPB’s magnum opus as a syncretistic work? (28.4)

EXCERPTS FROM *THE SECRET DOCTRINE* —

The Secret Doctrine teaches the progressive development of everything, worlds as well as atoms; and this stupendous development has neither conceivable beginning nor imaginable end. (1:43)

Occultism teaches that no form can be given to anything, either by nature or by man, whose ideal type does not already exist on the subjective plane. (1:282)

Like the Universe itself, Science is ever *becoming*, and can never say, “I am that I am.” On the other hand, Occult Science has its *changeless* traditions from pre-historic times. It may err in particulars; it can never become guilty of a mistake in questions of Universal laws . . . (1:516)

The blinds which conceal the real mysteries of Esoteric philosophy are great and puzzling, and even now the last word cannot be given. The veil, however, may be a little more removed and some explanations, hitherto denied, may now be offered to the earnest student. (2:310)

SUPPLEMENTAL READING:

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THE THREE FUNDAMENTAL PROPOSITIONS

By Mary Anderson

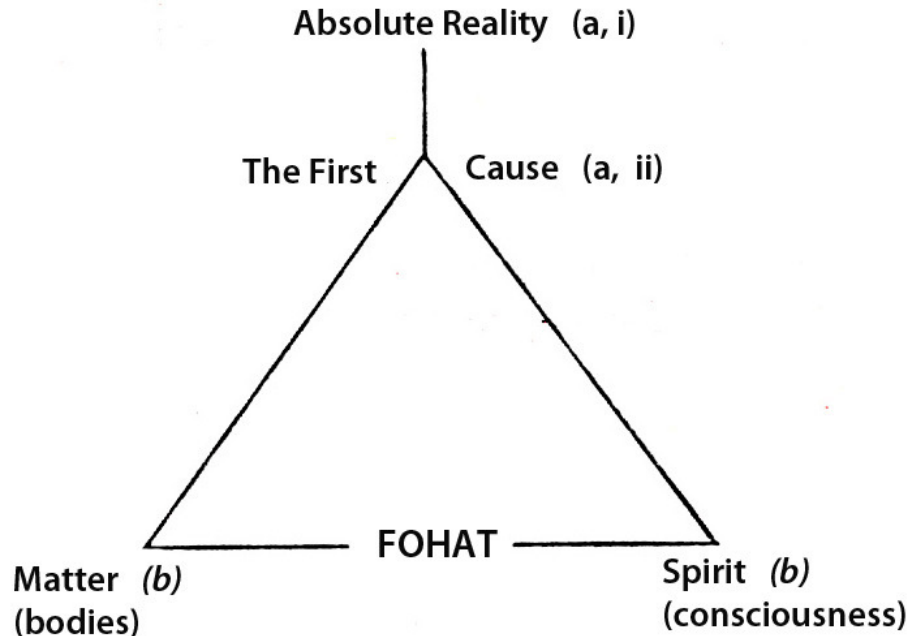
Published in the November 1970 issue of *The Theosophist*

Madame Blavatsky describes the Three Fundamental Propositions, which she expounds in the Proem of *The Secret Doctrine*, as “the basic conceptions on which the Secret Doctrine rests.” She adds that they are contained “in every system of thought or philosophy worthy of the name.”

Let us examine each of the Propositions in turn. It is interesting to note that each one of them seems to contain two parts: a more “transcendental,” more spiritual part, less easy for the mind to understand; and a part that deals rather with manifestation, with the world we “know,” and which is more accessible to the mind. I have tried to express each of the Propositions as a diagram in the form of a triangle whose apex (a) represents the “transcendental” part and whose base (b) represents the part related to manifestation.

I. The first Fundamental Proposition contains the following conceptions:

ABSOLUTE REALITY; DUALITY IN MANIFESTATION



a(i) Let us consider the two opening sentences of the first Proposition: “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. It is beyond the range and reach of thought—in the words of the *Māndūkya Upanishad*, ‘unthinkable and unspeakable.’”¹

“An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable PRINCIPLE . . .” Such a description invites us to meditate, or at least to reflect on the meaning of these expressions, to consider to what they refer.

—*Omnipresent*: Present everywhere. There is not one single particle in the objects we know—in our bodies, in the air we breathe, even in space—where this PRINCIPLE is not present. We are reminded of the phrase, “that which has its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere.”

—*Eternal*: There is no single moment in time as we know it and (if we can conceive of such a thing) no moment “outside” our time when this PRINCIPLE did not and does not exist.

—*Boundless*: Astronomers do not know whether the Universe has somewhere an end or a boundary—but this PRINCIPLE has no limit; it has no bounds.

—*Immutable*: Everything we know changes. We ourselves change; we evolve. The world as we know it changes. Even the mountains were not always there. But it is said here that this PRINCIPLE never has changed and never will change.

To reflect on this is a very good exercise for the mind. The mind expands when it considers to what it is that these expressions refer. But the mind never manages to comprehend them completely. It tries to understand. It expands more and more in the process—but it cannot exceed its own capacities. (We are reminded of the fable by Jean de La Fontaine: *The frog who wanted to become as big as an ox* . . . and who puffed and blew in his effort to grow bigger, but without success, until he finally burst . . . which was perhaps a kind of transformation!) The mind cannot go beyond its own limits, but we may go beyond our momentary limits and begin to develop the intuition. HPB says this PRINCIPLE “is beyond the range and reach of thought . . . ‘unthinkable and unspeakable.’”

a(ii) HPB now introduces a conception which is relatively easier, the conception of the Reality which precedes all manifestation. She says: “To render these ideas clearer to the general reader, let him set out with the postulate that there is one absolute Reality which antecedes all manifested, conditioned being . . . the rootless root of ‘all that was, is, or ever shall be.’”²

This mysterious rootless root might be said to correspond to the “Prime Cause,” the causeless cause with which we meet in Western philosophy as expressed by Aristotle, Leibniz, and St. Thomas Aquinas. This Prime Cause was one of the proofs put forward by certain philosophers for the existence of God. Their argument was as follows: Each limited object has a cause; this cause has also had a cause. One could (if one were omniscient!) trace

the causes of the causes of the causes far back; but such a “follow-up” could not, they said, go on forever, and we arrive finally at a cause which has itself had no cause: the so-called First Cause or Prime Cause. This Prime Cause would be God. Personally, I do not think that one can really prove the existence of God to the mind by means of this argument, or by means of any other argument. Although the idea of a Prime Cause stimulates the mind and forces it to make an effort that brings it to the very limit of its capacities, the mind can never quite fully fathom this idea.

In the same manner, it is sometimes demanded of the pupil in Zen Buddhism to enquire within himself what he was *before* he entered his mother’s womb. The mind is thus confronted with something fundamental.

HPB comments that this Reality has no attributes—no particular qualities. Let us try to imagine something that has no attributes. Let us take, for simplicity’s sake, an everyday object and remove its attributes; for example, a table. Let us imagine a table devoid of any color. It is neither brown, nor red, nor black, nor white, nor any other color. Furthermore, it is made of no particular material: not wood, not metal, not plastic, etc. Let us next remove its form. It is neither round nor rectangular, neither large nor small . . . We arrive finally at the Platonic idea of a table—the ideal table which is simply “table.” It is the “idea” behind all tables. If we can for a moment conceive of such a Platonic idea, we are using the higher mind; we are thinking abstractly. Let us go a step further and remove the idea of a table—and the mind is completely lost! We are perhaps left with the conception of pure existence. We cannot conceive pure existence mentally, but we have somehow approached it, thanks to various mental exercises. It is possible in this way to function for a moment on the higher mental level, the level of abstract thought, thought without a concrete object. It is perhaps even possible to have a momentary intuition of what HPB means when she refers to the “absolute Reality” which “antecedes all manifested, conditioned being.”

Such a procedure is analogous to the meditation in which one tries successively to realize: “I am not my body; I am not my feelings; I am not my thoughts.” What is left is what is fundamental. In Hindu philosophy it is said (in an attempt to describe the indescribable) that it is “not this, not that . . .” By putting aside all concrete objects, one may arrive for a moment at the Abstract, the Fundamental.

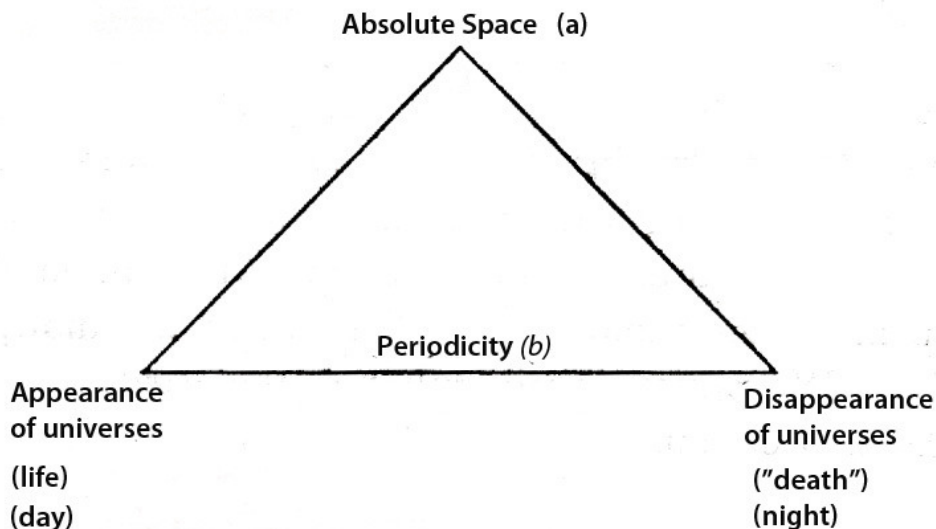
(b) HPB goes on to say that this absolute Reality has two aspects: “absolute Abstract Space, representing bare subjectivity” and “absolute Abstract Motion, representing Unconditioned Consciousness”;³ in other words, original Matter and original Spirit. These two Aspects form a triad with the Reality. But HPB warns us that Spirit and Matter are not to be considered as two independent realities but as two aspects of the Absolute. From Spirit and Matter stem countless “pairs of opposites”; on the one hand, force and all individual consciousness; and on the other hand, matter, the objective aspect of Nature. The one cannot exist without the other. All matter is conscious, however feeble that consciousness may be. All consciousness needs a vehicle of matter, however subtle that matter may be—

even if too subtle to be perceived by our ordinary senses.

HPB adds that the whole universe is pervaded by duality. It is composed of pairs of opposites, but there is a connecting link between the opposites. The connection is ensured by the force of “Fohat,” the “bridge” by which the “Ideas” existing in the “Divine Thought” are impressed on Cosmic Substance as the “Laws of Nature.” She then explains, “Thus from Spirit, or Cosmic Ideation, comes our consciousness: from Cosmic Substance the several vehicles in which that consciousness is individualized and attains to self—or reflective—consciousness; while Fohat, in its various manifestations, is the mysterious link between Mind and Matter, the animating principle electrifying every atom into life.”⁴

If we go deeply into what HPB says, we find that it concerns us very intimately. We are confronted not simply with beautiful, difficult theories, accessible only to scholars and saints, but with force and substances that we are constantly using in our waking consciousness and in sleep. They *are* ourselves at our deepest level of being. They are the Reality towards which we aspire when we try to conceive of an Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless and Immutable PRINCIPLE—and at the same time this PRINCIPLE is present in our daily activity, in the constant game which we play when we impose our thought on matter.

II. The conceptions contained in the second Fundamental Proposition can be described as:
THE ETERNITY OF THE UNIVERSE; PERIODICITY



HPB affirms first of all the Eternity of the Universe *in toto* as a boundless plane, then adds that this Universe is periodically “the playground of numberless Universes incessantly manifesting and disappearing.”⁵

The word “Universe” is used in two senses: first, the Universe *in toto*, eternal in time and boundless in space (a); second, Universes in the plural, limited in time and space (b).

In connection with the appearance and disappearance of Universes, HPB speaks of the Principle of Periodicity,⁶ which is related to the conception of duality; for periodicity might be imagined as the movement of a pendulum swinging to and fro between two extremes, e.g., between the appearance and disappearance of Universes or, on a smaller scale, between life and death, summer and winter, day and night.

This alternation of, e.g., day and night is a process which we can observe in our daily life. We can conceive how this process is repeated on a larger scale in different historical and astronomical and other cycles, the pendulum swinging, as it were, from one extreme to the other and passing through various stages in the process. We may think of the numerous civilizations that have flourished, dominated the world for a time, and then gradually decayed and were forgotten: Egypt, Greece, Rome; the City-States of Italy; France in the “Grand Siècle”; the empires of Spain, Holland, and Great Britain.

We may think of our Earth, remembering what we have been told: that the Life Wave has already inhabited our earth three times, clad in much finer matter than that which we know; that this Life Wave now again inhabits the earth, clad in physical matter; and that it will leave it again, to return three times . . . Let us think of the three chains which preceded the seven rounds of our earth chain and the three chains which will follow.

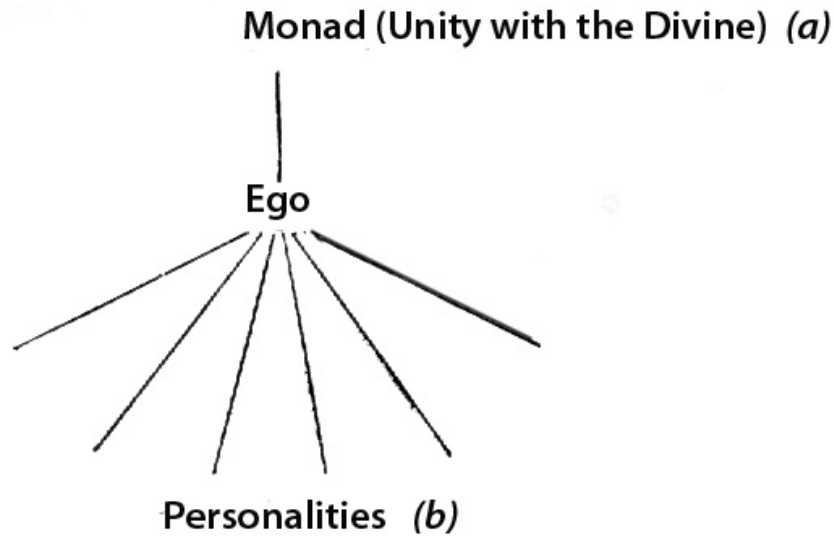
Let us think of the whole plan of evolution, of the life which comes and goes on the planets—and on the planets of other plans of evolution which form our solar system. Let us consider all the solar systems of our galaxy. Everything that appears in the field of manifestation lasts a few years, a few centuries, or a few millions of years, and then ultimately disappears once again. Reflecting on all this is a fine exercise for the mind.

The mind can conceive even light-years, but it cannot really conceive an Eternity which is not “of time” (although time may be said to be “within” it), the eternity of the Universe *in toto*—not a boring eternity made up of endless time but an eternity which transcends time.

Again we can observe that all this concerns us directly. We obey the Law of Periodicity in daily life. We are born and we die. We fall asleep and we awake. We breathe in and out! All this takes place in the boundless Space that enfolds us, which, like a mother, enfolds and shelters all things we know, all things we do not know.

III. The third Fundamental Proposition contains the conceptions of

THE DIVINITY AND THE UNITY OF ALL BEINGS;
THEIR SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION;
REINCARNATION AND KARMA.



(a) HPB states: “Moreover, the Secret Doctrine teaches . . . the fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul, the latter being itself an aspect of the Unknown Root.”⁷ This is a very beautiful and enlightening conception—a conception which perhaps prompted a master of Zen Buddhism to say that a dog is Buddha, that we are Buddha, that all is Buddha. As HPB says with reference to the first Fundamental Proposition, the absolute Reality is omnipresent; it is, therefore, within us; we *are* that Reality. It follows that we are, in our essential being, neither better nor worse than another person, be he criminal or saint, that on the spiritual level we are one with him. If we reflect on this, we shall arrive at the conception of the Unity of all beings, of all things. If we are really conscious of that Unity (which is possible only beyond the mind)—and we are far from being so as yet—we shall lose all fear, all hate, all sorrow.

(b) HPB then refers to the obligation for every Soul to go through the cycle of Incarnation, in accordance with Cyclic and Karmic law, before reaching conscious perfection.

As in the first Proposition where a hint was given of the fundamental unity of all Monads with the Divine, so in the second Proposition a definite hint was given (in the principle of periodicity) of the conception of reincarnation.

This much of the third Fundamental Proposition is completely clear: The idea of an obligatory pilgrimage through many incarnations, carried out in accordance with divine law, and leading to conscious perfection, appeals to our sense of logic. At the same time, it lifts our mind out of its day-to-day routine; it opens up for the mind the way to a joyful expansion, thus satisfying our deepest needs, if only we can open ourselves to its far-reaching implications, without clinging to our preconceived ideas.

The Three Fundamental Propositions form, so to speak, a Trinity. We might consider it a trinity of Father, Mother, and Child (as in the old Egyptian conception of Osiris, Isis, and Horus):

- The first Fundamental Proposition refers to the absolute Reality as an inconceivable PRINCIPLE and then to its first Manifestation as dual aspects. We might say that it deals with God—but here we mean “God” in the widest possible sense, in the sense of the Absolute, the PRINCIPLE behind all things, the Reality which is all things and which manifests also as man. This Proposition might correspond to the Divine as Father.
- The second Proposition deals with the Universe in the widest sense of the word, in the sense of limitless Space—and then with Universes in the plural, an idea more accessible to us. This Proposition might be said to correspond to the conception of the Divine as Mother. Space is often represented as female in occult literature.
- The third Proposition deals above all with man, man as a Monad, one with the Divine, then man as an Ego, incarnating again and again in various personalities. This Proposition might be said to show us God as Man, the Child—and heir—of the Divine.

At the same time (as was said earlier), we are able to distinguish in each of the Three Propositions two aspects: one that is of a transcendent nature, and one relating to the field of manifestation. The latter deals with particulars and details familiar to us all, and is therefore easier to grasp. But although the transcendent part is, as Mme. Blavatsky said, beyond the power of human conception or speculation, it remains a worthy subject for sustained reflection and meditation.

Mary Anderson was introduced to Theosophy as a child while living in Scotland. She later moved to Basle, Switzerland where she worked as a trilingual secretary for forty years. Her service to the Theosophical Society includes six years as General Secretary of the Swiss Section, thirty years as Secretary of the European Federation, six years as International Vice-President (Adyar) and another six years as International Secretary. She has traveled the world giving lectures and courses in English, French, and German.

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1. Blavatsky, H. P. *The Secret Doctrine*. Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1979, vol. 1, p. 14.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 16.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 17.
7. Ibid.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: (References to article are by page and paragraph.)

1. Consider the author's view that you cannot prove the existence of God by means of the Prime Cause argument. Do you agree? (35.0)
2. In her exposition of the first Proposition, HPB says this PRINCIPLE is "beyond the power of human conception." If that is so, what then is the value of intellectual inquiry regarding the first Proposition? (34.6)
3. Using your own words, restate the Three Fundamental Propositions.
4. Find a single word that sums up and represents each of the three Propositions.

EXCERPTS FROM *THE SECRET DOCTRINE*

Space is neither a "limitless void," nor a "conditioned fullness," but both: being, on the plane of absolute abstraction, the ever-incognizable Deity, which is void only to finite minds, and on that of *māyāvic* perception, the Plenum, the absolute Container of all that is whether manifested or unmanifested: it is, therefore, that ABSOLUTE ALL. There is no difference between the Christian Apostle's "In Him we live and move and have our being," and the Hindu Rishi's "The Universe lives in, proceeds from, and will return to Brahman (Brahmā): for Brahma (neuter), the unmanifested, is that Universe *in abscondito*, and Brahmā, the manifested, is the Logos, made male-female in the symbolical orthodox dogmas. (1:8-9)

Once the reader has gained a clear comprehension of them [the Three Fundamental Propositions] and realized the light which they throw on every problem of life, they will need no further justification in his eyes, because their truth will be to him as evident as the sun in heaven. (1:20)

SEED THOUGHTS FOR MEDITATION:

- That which has its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere . . .
- The rootless root of "all that was, is, or ever shall be . . ."
- "We are, in our essential being, neither better nor worse than another person."
- Meditate on who you were *before* you entered your mother's womb.
- Select a physical object and visualize it in your mind's eye for a minute or two, noticing all its physical attributes (size, shape, color, texture, etc.); hold that image in your mind while you gradually strip away those attributes, one by one; then meditate on what is left after all the attributes have been discarded.
- Select a personal problem that you are currently dealing with and then consider it in the light of the Three Fundamental Propositions.

THE THREE FUNDAMENTAL PROPOSITIONS OF *THE SECRET DOCTRINE*:
THEIR PRACTICAL APPLICATION

By John Algeo

Adapted from the March 1997 issue of *Quest*

The Wisdom Tradition called Theosophy includes both a few great principles and many practical applications of those principles to various situations in life. Three of the principles can be summarized by the words *wholeness*, *order*, and *purpose*, denoting concepts that lie at the very heart of the Theosophical philosophy and have significant implications for daily living.

Those great principles are best expressed in the Three Fundamental Propositions of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky's major work, *The Secret Doctrine*. Contained in the "Proem" of that book,¹ they can be abridged as follows:

The Secret Doctrine establishes three fundamental propositions:—

(a) 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. It is beyond the range and reach of thought. . . . This Infinite and Eternal Cause . . . is the rootless root of "all that was, is, or ever shall be". . . . Thus, then, the first fundamental axiom of the Secret Doctrine is this metaphysical ONE ABSOLUTE BE-NESS—symbolized by finite intelligence as the theological Trinity. . . . Spirit (or Consciousness) and Matter are . . . to be regarded, not as independent realities, but as the two facets or aspects of the Absolute. . . . Hence it will be apparent that the contrast of these two aspects of the Absolute is essential to the existence of the "Manifested Universe."²

(b) The Eternity of the Universe in *toto* as a boundless plane; periodically "the playground of numberless Universes incessantly manifesting and disappearing," called "the manifesting stars," and the "sparks of Eternity." . . . This second assertion of the Secret Doctrine is the absolute universality of that law of periodicity, of flux and reflux, ebb and flow, which physical science has observed and recorded in all departments of nature. An alternation such as that of Day and Night, Life and Death, Sleeping and Waking, is a fact so common, so perfectly universal and without exception, that it is easy to comprehend that in it we see one of the absolutely fundamental laws of the universe.³

(c) The fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul, the latter being itself an aspect of the Unknown Root; and the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul— a spark of the former—through the Cycle of Incarnation (or "Necessity") in

accordance with Cyclic and Karmic law, during the whole term. . . . The pivotal doctrine of the Esoteric philosophy admits no privileges or special gifts in man, save those won by his own Ego through personal effort and merit throughout a long series of metempsychoses and reincarnations.⁴

Such are the basic conceptions on which the Secret Doctrine rests. . . . They are, in fact, contained—though too often under a misleading guise—in every system of thought or philosophy worthy of the name.⁵

Once that the reader has gained a clear comprehension of them and realized the light which they throw on every problem of life, they will need no further justification in his eyes, because their truth will be to him as evident as the sun in heaven.⁵

However evident these great concepts may be, the light they throw on the problems of life must be interpreted by each person individually. Theosophy sets forth the principles; their application is up to each one of us. When we have realized the meaning of the Fundamental Propositions, not just intellectually but in our lives, we can apply them and practice them. As a guide, however, we can consider some of the implications others have found in the Fundamental Propositions and some of the applications that have been made of them.

WHOLENESS AND UNITY

The first Fundamental Proposition is that all existence is a unified whole. The underlying unity cannot be perceived by our senses, nor its nature comprehended by our minds, but it alone is ultimately real and is the ground of all existence. It is the reality behind all our ideas about “God.” Consciousness and matter are two complementary aspects of it, like the head and tail of one coin.

Philosophically, this is a doctrine of monism. It is not a simplistic monism holding that the only ultimate is either mind (idealism) or matter (materialism). It is rather the proposition that what is ultimately real is neither mental nor material, but instead an organic whole of which both mind and matter are partial expressions that can be understood only in terms of each other.

This proposition—abstract, general, comprehensive, and theoretical as it is—has implications that are concrete, specific, particular, and very practical. For one thing, it means that a life of either indulgence or asceticism is out of synch with the Way the world is. Moderation between extremes is the only right way to live.

The principle of unified wholeness also implies the “Gaia Theory,” the notion that our entire planet is a single living entity, of which we and all other terrestrial beings are parts. Indeed beyond the limits of our planet only, the complete cosmos—with all of its planets, solar systems, galaxies, and super galaxies—is a single living whole.

A result of recognizing our interdependence with the entire planet is respect for the environment and concern for other living creatures, expressed in such particular practices as recycling, vegetarianism, and the eschewal of sport-hunting and fur wearing.

ORDER AND CYCLES

The second Fundamental Proposition is that the world is an orderly place. That assumption is a corollary of the principle of wholeness. It is also basic to the work of scientists and indeed to everything we all do. We assume that causes are going to have effects, that things are not in a jumble but form patterns. The orderly pattern of the world in particular is a cyclical one: day and night, spring and fall, life and death, succeeding each other and recapitulating the antecedent states.

Scientific theories of cosmology have largely settled (at least for the present) on a model for the origin of the universe called the Big Bang. The principal remaining question is about what happens after the Bang: Does the universe go on expanding forever until it is infinitely tenuous and runs out of steam? Or does it reverse itself and everything fall together in a Big Crunch? Or do we live in a Yo-Yo universe, in which expansion and contraction follow each other without cessation? Whatever view present or future scientific theorizing may favor, the Wisdom Tradition opts for a version of the last option. The whole cosmos is cyclical.

The cycles of the heavenly bodies and the cycles of human life coincide in curious ways, a fact long asserted by astrologers, though pooh-pooed by astronomers and their colleagues in the other sciences. We have, it seems, interior planets in our psyches to match the exterior ones in the heavens.

One of the curiosities of the human circadian rhythm is that we do not live by the sun but by the moon. Our internal clock, like that of the other primates, ticks according to a day of approximately twenty-five hours. That is roughly the time between moonrises, rather than the twenty-four hours between sunrises. We are lunar rather than solar beings (a fact also recognized in H. P. Blavatsky's mythopoeic work, *The Secret Doctrine*), but we are orderly, cyclical creatures in that and other ways.

The Greek word for the universe, *kosmos*, also meant both "order" and "beauty," the latter sense now trivialized in the adjective cosmetic. But apart from that trivialization, the threefold meaning of the Greek word is a powerful insight. Orderliness is beautiful, beauty is orderly, and the universe is both.

The social pattern of our lives is a ritual, an action of beautiful and meaningful order. Confucius knew about that. He held up the correct performance of *li*, the sacred ceremony, as the basis of all social order and personal accomplishment. The wearing of vestments, literal or figurative, is no inconsequential act; it is an identification of our lives with the orderly, beauteous, and meaningful pattern of the cosmos.

The result of recognizing the cyclical order of the universe is that we reprise that order in our own lives. We join the dance of Shiva, the god who both recreates and re-creates the universe by dancing. Human beings are creatures with a passion for order and beauty. In living that order, in responding to that beauty, we fulfill our nature.

PURPOSE AND PROGRESS

Wholeness and order are dandy, but what good are they? What is their use? What is it all for? The third Fundamental Proposition says that the world process is not, despite the view of certain modern writers, an absurdity. It has purpose. It has direction.

As separate individuals we are yet integral parts of the whole, and thus our meaning and purpose is framed by that Whole. That is the message of the first Proposition. All life is a dance drama, the dance of Shiva, Lord of the Dance, a ritual enactment governed by cyclic and karmic law. That is the message of the second Proposition. The third Proposition builds upon those two. It says we are pilgrims in the great cycle of existence, returning to the Unity that birthed us.

Pilgrims are not just travelers. They are travelers who are going to a particular goal for a sacred purpose. The attainment of that goal and the achievement of that purpose are, however, up to the pilgrims, to each of us. We have not only the possibility of arriving but the obligation of discovering the Way. No guru can do it for us; no shortcut—intellectual, mechanical, or chemical—is available. Only personal effort and merit will avail.

What makes life worth living? It is the love of wisdom, philosophy, attained by what the Anglo-Saxons called *modgethonc*—“heart thought.” Drugs won’t do it. We live in a culture that expects a pill to cure every ill, to give every pleasure. But there is no wisdom pill to take us out of the samsara of this delusional world into the reality of nirvana.

Indeed, as the Northern Buddhists point out, reaching nirvana is a matter of realizing that nirvana and samsara are the same place. Eternity is not the opposite of time, but its fulfillment. Our purpose is not found in abandoning the world, but in realizing it. Progress is not a continual elevation from one state to another, like a Free-mason passing through unending degrees. It is finding the valley of true light in the midst of the vale of darkness.

Robert Ellwood has written, “In every world, in every stage of life, in every situation, then, lies hidden meaning, purpose, and a way to the Center.”⁶ That is what the third Proposition is about. A long series of metempsychoses and reincarnations are needed before we reach the Center. Yet in this pilgrimage, we do not abandon the past, but rediscover it.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

—T. S. Eliot, “Little Gidding”

The result of achieving our purpose is to arrive at the goal of our pilgrimage. It is to return home. But home is here. And now. And that is the greatest of the great principles and the most fundamental of all propositions.

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2. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 14-15
3. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 16-17
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6. Ellwood, Robert, *The Pilgrim Self: Traveling the Path from Life to Life*, TPH, Wheaton, 1996, p. 30.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: (References to article are by page and paragraph.)

1. The three words John Algeo uses to summarize the Three Fundamental Propositions are *wholeness*, *order*, and *purpose*. Can you think of any others words that might also be appropriate? (41.1)
2. What is the meaning of the word “monism”? (42.5)
3. If the world is an orderly place, as the second Fundamental Proposition states, then why is there so much chaos and disorder in the world? (41.4)
4. What is the meaning of the term “circadian rhythm”? (43.5)
5. What are some other ways human life is affected by cycles?
6. Do you sense a relation between beauty and order? Give some examples.
7. How does disorder generally affect you?
8. Explore the difference between a pilgrim and traveler. (44.4)
9. How does Theosophy help provide meaning to human existence?

EXCERPTS FROM *THE SECRET DOCTRINE* —

The one circle is divine Unity, from which all proceeds, whither all returns. (1:1)

The unity and mutual relations of all parts of Kosmos were known to the ancients, before they became evident to modern astronomers and philosophers. (1:480)

Everything in the Universe progresses steadily in the Great Cycle, while incessantly going up and down in the smaller cycles. Nature is never stationary during manvantara, as it is ever *becoming*, not simply *being*. (1:257)

This process has been going on from all eternity, and our present universe is but one of an infinite series which had no beginning and will have no end. (1:4n)

It is hardly necessary to remind the reader once more that the term “Divine Thought,” like that of “Universal Mind,” must not be regarded as even vaguely shadowing forth an intellectual process akin to that exhibited by man. (1:1n)

The personal God of orthodox Theism perceives, thinks, and is affected by emotion; he repents and feels “fierce anger.” But the notion of such mental states clearly involves the unthinkable postulate of the externality of the exciting stimuli, to say nothing of the impossibility of ascribing changelessness to a Being whose emotions fluctuate with the events in the worlds he presides over. The conceptions of a Personal God as a changeless and infinite are thus unpsychological and, what is worse, unphilosophical. (1:2n)

According to the great metaphysician Hegel . . . Nature was a *perpetual becoming*. A purely esoteric conception. Creation or Origin, in the Christian sense of the term, is absolutely unthinkable. As the above-quoted thinker said: “God [the Universal Spirit] *objectivizes himself as Nature*, and again rises out of it.” (1:257n)

Apparently, the universally coexistent forces of attraction and repulsion which . . . necessitate rhythm in all minor changes throughout the Universe, also necessitate rhythm in the totality of its changes—produce now an immeasurable period during which the attracting forces predominating, cause universal concentration, and then an immeasurable period, during which the repulsive forces predominating, cause universal diffusion—alternate eras of evolution and dissolution. (1:12n)

Modern physics, while borrowing from the ancients their atomic theory, forgot one point, the most important of the doctrine; hence they got only the husks and will never be able to get at the kernel. They left behind, in the adoption of physical atoms, the suggestive fact that from Anaxagoras down to Epicurus, the Roman Lucretius, and finally even to Galileo, all those Philosophers believed more or less in ANIMATED atoms, not in invisible specks of so-called “brute” matter. (1:567-8)*

* Compiler’s note: At the time *The Secret Doctrine* was published, subatomic particles had not yet been discovered and most scientists believed atoms to be composed of solid matter.

WHAT'S PRACTICAL ABOUT THEM?
THE THREE FUNDAMENTAL PROPOSITIONS OF *THE SECRET DOCTRINE*

By Virginia Hanson

Published in the July 1974 issue of *The American Theosophist*

“The trouble with the Three Fundamental Propositions is that they are way up there in the blue somewhere. They don’t answer any of my problems. Why should I bother to study them?”

How often do we hear this complaint, not only about the Three Fundamental Propositions, but about *The Secret Doctrine* as a whole? The concepts are too abstract, too vast, and too impossible to comprehend. “Anyhow, it’s all speculative, and I’ve got to earn my bread and butter, look after my family, and carry on my business. I haven’t got time for something I can’t use.”

If *The Secret Doctrine* did nothing more than lift our minds “way up there in the blue” it would have served some purpose: we would have a wider perspective; we would be able to see our problems as a whole and perhaps stop running around on our little squirrel-wheels of doubt and speculation. For it is at the “daily problem” level that we really speculate: “Is this right? Is that right? Should I do this? Should I do that? There must be an answer somewhere!”

Pure logic would give us answers, but we are seldom capable of pure logic at the “daily problem” level. It comes from a much higher octave of our beings and can scarcely get a wedge into the tangle of doubts, fears, angers, panic, and other often uncontrollable emotions that beset us when we are in the midst of situations which seem to pull us in several directions at once—in short, when we must make a choice between this or that or some other action, or remain paralyzed in inaction. In an extremity we may even wonder why the Masters do not help us, show us what to do, give us some direction.

Without intent to dogmatize on so serious a matter, I might suggest that we have already been given direction in *The Secret Doctrine*, and specifically in the Three Fundamental Propositions. These set forth the basic principles underlying universal operation, and humankind is inevitably a part of that operation. We cannot possibly extricate ourselves from it. This being the case, when we grasp that these principles govern our own being, we begin to understand that we can apply them in an infinite number of situations. It is perhaps significant in this connection that one definition of logic is “a system of underlying principles.” This is surely logic in its *pure* form. So perhaps we can turn to that deeper and higher level for light on our daily living.

In 1885, when *The Secret Doctrine* was in preparation, the Mahatma K. H. wrote to a German doctor, a member of The Theosophical Society: “*The Secret Doctrine*, when ready, will be the triple production of M. [the Master M.], Upasika [Mme. Blavatsky] and the Doctor’s most humble servant [K. H.]”¹ Thus we have the assurance that this great work comes, in part at least, from as high a source as we are likely to find on this planet.

Considering this source, then, we may ask how the Mahatmas themselves regarded the knowledge which they were making available for the first time to the Western world. In *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, the Mahatma K. H. said of this knowledge: “The truths and mysteries of occultism constitute, indeed, a body of the highest spiritual importance, at once profound and *practical* [italics mine] for the world at large. Yet, it is not as a mere addition to the tangled mass of theory or speculation in the world of science that these truths are being given to you, but for their practical bearing on the interests of mankind.”²

It is in our everyday world that we need to find the “practical bearing” of these transcendent truths. We cannot expect to be led by the hand and told, “Now do this! Do that!” It was surely through long and probably often agonizing effort in learning to apply the principles which they have set forth that the Adepts became what they are. The pilgrim can hardly expect the path to be made easy or soft, however footsore and weary he may become. This is clearly stated in the *Letters*: “The fact is, that to the last and supreme initiation every chela . . . is left to his own device and counsel. We have to fight our own battles, and the familiar adage—‘the adept *becomes*, he is not *made*’—is true to the letter.”³ In other words, we develop our spiritual muscles by using them, not by being relieved of the necessity to use them.

The natural response to this might well be: “But adeptship is something far in the future. I need something that will help me *now*.”

We might remind ourselves that every step we take—however small—leads us inexorably in one direction or another, toward fulfillment of our divine nature or toward its debasement. We are mistaken, I think, to denigrate even those small efforts which may seem to us to have little significance; if they are in accord with our best lights at the moment, they are surely necessary steps in our evolutionary journey.

It was suggested earlier that the Three Fundamental Propositions can show us our direction. If we understand them to be inviolable principles of the universe and of our own nature, then we need no longer think of them as something outside ourselves, something “up in the blue somewhere”; rather they can become so much a part of the texture of our lives that we no longer need to think of them consciously. They can serve as a spontaneous well-spring of truth in every circumstance and situation. The extent to which this takes place is surely the measure of the depth at which they have taken root in our beings. If we disregard them, concentrating only on mundane considerations, we are lost in the wilderness of choices; it is only from the wellspring of truth that the “choiceless choice” becomes possible.

HPB herself said of these three Propositions:

It would not be in place here to enter upon a defence or proof of their inherent reasonableness; nor can I pause to show how they are, in fact, contained—though too often under a misleading guise—in every system of thought or philosophy worthy of the name.

Once that the reader has gained a clear comprehension of them and realized *the light which they throw on every problem of life* [italics mine], they will need no further justification in his eyes, because their truth will be to him as evident as the sun in the heaven.⁴

With these assurances in mind, perhaps we may turn to a consideration of the propositions themselves. It will not be possible at the outset to avoid mention of some abstract ideas. But few of us, I think, would ever have become interested in Theosophy at all if we had not realized that back of everything that we see and hear and touch and taste and smell lies an abstraction—a “no-thing” which is not “nothing” but the hidden source of all things.

The first Proposition speaks of this hidden source—“An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable PRINCIPLE” which, says HPB, is the “one absolute Reality which antecedes all manifested, conditioned, being.” This is the “Infinite and Eternal Cause . . . the rootless root of ‘all that was, is, or ever shall be.’” It is the Absolute, “‘Be-ness’ rather than Being.”⁵

It is worth our while to ponder this, not being turned aside by impatience or frustration, or by HPB’s statement that this Be-ness is “beyond all thought or speculation.” Obviously, it is not a matter of speculation with her, but of an inner knowing, which is not brain-knowledge. We feel that we don’t and can’t really know much about Be-ness. We know we are *be-ings* and, as such, we are caught in a web of circumstances; often we may wonder whether we should try to get out or simply give up.

Certainly we can’t get out, and by the same token, it is futile to give up. But by the powers inherent in Be-ness, which are the potential powers of Be-ing, we can learn to command our response to circumstances, which in the truest sense is to command circumstances.

Another difficulty for us, perhaps, is grasping the idea of infinite potential without the existence of separate, specific things. If we may use a conditioned analogy at all (taking heart from HPB’s assurance that analogy is “the only true Ariadne’s thread”⁶ which will lead us to the solution of Nature’s primal mysteries), we might consider mind. Let us suppose that, even for an instant, we could make the mind completely blank—*completely*, without any specific thoughts in it at all. In this state, thoughts—*as thoughts*—do not exist; they are, we might say, “in solution”; what exists is “all-thought.” Nothing happens. There is only the self-existence of mind itself—*mindness*, rather than mind. Yet the potential for an infinite number of separate thoughts is there. The mind can think of *anything*. The possibilities are limitless. And the instant mindness becomes mind, specific thoughts are precipitated. This is “automatic.” Nothing makes it happen; it just happens, because thought is the natural activity

of mind. Yet there has been no separation from mindness; there has been only the expression of mindness in mind and, therefore, in thoughts.

In somewhat the same manner, perhaps, the universe (and we should remember that man is the universe in miniature) precipitates from Be-ness into Be-ing when the creative impulse begins to stir. There is no separation from Be-ness; there is only Be-ness in manifestation. This manifestation takes multitudinous forms out of the infinite richness of its source. The eternal and immutable principle (Be-ness) says HPB, is not only “latent in every atom in the Universe,” but is, in fact, “the Universe itself.”⁷

Now, how can it be of any practical use to us to know all this? It may seem remote from anything with which we are ordinarily concerned, unless we can see it as *constantly taking place*, not only in the fact of our presence here in this physical world, but in every situation, in every happening in which we are involved.

To bring the concept a little closer, we may recall that HPB tells us in her commentary that this Absolute Reality has three aspects. She names these as Absolute Abstract Motion, Absolute Abstract Space, and Duration. Again, we may seem to be grappling with mind-splitting ideas. Without going into her discussion of these aspects in the “absolute” sense, let us consider what they imply so far as *we* are concerned.

Absolute Abstract Motion is spoken of as pre-cosmic ideation. It is the root of that quality which makes *creativity* possible; it is the root of individual consciousness. Through infinite gradations and “steppings-down” (somewhat as a transformer steps down the naked power of electricity so that it becomes useful rather than destructive), it manifests as *our* consciousness, *our* mind, *our* thought.

Absolute Abstract Space is defined as pre-cosmic space—the root of that quality which makes *forms* possible—gives “thingness” to creation, to use Ernest Wood’s apt description. It is the substratum of matter, i.e., the root potential of every kind of matter that we can know here in the physical world, including our physical bodies, not to mention the more subtle forms of matter.

Duration is the root of *time*—that from which the principle of order emerges into manifestation. It is the root of that quality which makes *action* possible.

So there we are: From this one absolute Reality we derive our consciousness, our minds, our power of thought, our power to create. We derive matter, out of which things are created; and we derive time, which gives us freedom for creative action. Not only is this Reality the very root of ourselves; it is the root of everything we *are*, of everything we *work with*, and of every *capacity* at our command.

From this sublime truth comes the doctrine of the One Life. If it is real to us, we can no longer regard brotherhood as just a beautiful ideal which we hope will someday—in the far distant future perhaps—be realized. We see brotherhood as an inescapable law—as inescap-

able as the law of gravity or any other natural law through which the One Life manifests. This means respect not only for human beings, but respect for all life. We see that we cannot break this law; we can only break ourselves against it until we learn to obey it morally just as instinctively as we now physically obey the law of gravity. This, I think, is the ultimate practicality of the first Fundamental Proposition.

The second Proposition states the absolute universality of the law of periodicity through which the One Life operates the flux and reflux, the ebb and flow of activity.⁸ HPB adds that the alternations of day and night, life and death, sleeping and waking, are so common and so universal that it is easy to realize that the law of periodicity is one of the absolutely fundamental laws of nature. She refers to the universe itself as the periodic manifestation of the One Reality postulated in the first proposition.

So the law of periodicity extends to the outermost limits of anything we can know, and beyond. The universe is *maya*, she tells us, because its manifestation (and therefore the manifestation of all things) is temporary.

The word *maya*, as we know, is so often translated as “illusion” that we may be inclined to think it means that nothing at all exists, that our whole world of experience—happy and unhappy, beautiful and ugly—is pure hallucination. If this were true, we could sympathize deeply with the woman who, going through a period of great trial, cried out, “Why should I ask God to forgive *me*? How can *I* ever forgive God!” We feel in our inmost being that the world experience cannot be some ghastly joke perpetrated upon helpless beings by a cruel and malicious deity. One may say it is “unreal” because it is relative and therefore not eternal. It is the realm of effects. But it is no more unreal than the trunk, branches, and leaves of a tree are unreal because they are not the roots. Roots, trunk, branches, and leaves are one tree, but the source of its life—the “treeness”—is in the part that is hidden. *Maya* is a power, the power of creation. It is action and that which is produced by action. The earliest root meaning of the word, it is said, is “a magic creation or display”⁹ or the process of creative imagination. This is a natural process—we might say an involuntary process. For to *be* is to *create*. Frequently it is asked, “If God is perfect in the first place, why is all this evolution necessary?” It may very well be that our human concept of motivation is quite irrelevant. It seems to me that the simple and only answer is: to be is to create.

This second Fundamental Proposition has an important relation to another aspect mentioned earlier—that of Duration, the root of time, that quality which makes action possible. Duration is spoken of as changeless, but the root of change. Process is involved in the cyclic law—and process always involves change. The second proposition, then, sets forth the principle of the orderly processes of time and change. And this, we realize, is the process in which we are all “caught.” Our world religions, our philosophies, our sciences, all are influenced by it, because it is the process which permits the unfoldment of consciousness.

From this second Proposition, we derive our conviction that reincarnation (referred to more specifically in the third Proposition) is one manifestation of this cyclic law. For every

experiencing being life reveals itself as an endless series of new beginnings. Because this is true, we realize that while we cannot actually, objectively, change the past—our karma—we *can* change our consciousness in relation to past events. We see our karma in a wholly new light, and this *does* change it because our own consciousness is the greatest factor in our individual karma. The causes are in us, and so long as they remain, they must work themselves out in effects; but the nature of those effects is completely altered by the changes that take place in ourselves through this “endless series of new beginnings.” This, I think, is a supremely practical application of the second proposition.

In the third Fundamental Proposition the doctrine of reincarnation is specifically set forth. And here we can begin to see that all these Propositions are mutually and inextricably linked together. The third Proposition affirms the fundamental identity of every soul with the universal Oversoul, and the “obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul . . . through the Cycle of Incarnation.” Further, this Proposition makes our pilgrimage dependent upon “self-induced and self-devised efforts” without the benefit of any special privileges or gifts save those we win for ourselves.¹⁰

Up to the time we reach humanhood—and perhaps for many lives after that—progress is accomplished through what HPB calls “natural impulse.” This is evolution itself, which ever moves forward and cannot ultimately reverse itself. But from the time we awaken to the fact of our individual responsibility, the whole thing becomes a “do-it-yourself” project. Wherever we are going, we have to get there by our own efforts; we can’t ride on the coat-tails of anyone else.

Although we have only to ponder this to recognize its truth, we still have the realization that we travel in the company of other pilgrims in mutual affection and helpfulness. Our enterprise is a common one, although our individual discoveries and accomplishments are unique expressions of that enterprise. It might be suggested also that we should not conclude that the term “self-induced and self-devised effort” means the personality is left alone to do the whole thing. We have other and greater powers upon which to draw—“the *deific* powers in man,”¹¹ powers rooted in the Reality set forth in the first proposition and which we are in the process of unfolding.

There is only one way, then, to go forward: We must find what *are* the powers we have to work with. We must become acquainted with the universe in which we exercise those powers, remembering that we are not separate from it. We can’t change what is, but we must know it if we are to be an intelligent part of it. This means coming to grips with the fact of our fundamental identity with the Universal Oversoul and making it manifest in our daily lives.

We take for granted certain of our powers—the power to walk, for instance, the power to speak and to do certain other mechanical and physical things. We know we have the power to feel, the power to think. And when we need something for which our physical powers are inadequate, we use the powers of mind to invent machinery that will do it for

us, manifesting that aspect of Be-ness which makes creativity possible, that aspect which makes form possible, and that aspect which makes action possible.

Also, we take for granted the universe in which we live. We confidently expect that the earth will continue to turn on its axis, to revolve about the sun, and that all the stars and planets will continue in their accustomed courses. But if we think more deeply, we know it is all a very great mystery. We can only contemplate with awe and wonder the great Intelligence which designed and continues to maintain and direct this perfectly ordered universe. Because of our fundamental identity with the Oversoul, these godlike powers are inherent in us. By our self-induced and self-devised efforts we must bring them into flowering. "Only if we know that the thing which truly matters is the infinite," says Dr. Carl Jung, "can we avoid fixing our interest upon futilities, and upon all kinds of goals which are not of real importance."¹²

Could we think of the great truths of the Three Fundamental Propositions as a living flow of force rather than as abstract ideas? They flow through every one of us continuously, indestructibly, eternally. They are not, then, "way up there in the blue." They are the ultimate here-and-now of our existence. Perhaps we might paraphrase Chesterton's comment about philosophy in general and say that the question is not whether these great truths really matter to us; the question is whether anything else matters.

Virginia Hanson joined the Theosophical Society of America in 1949. Professionally, she worked as an editor for publications of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, U.S. Department of Justice. Upon retirement, she moved to the national center of the TSA and worked as editor of the members' journal, *The American Theosophist*. In 1972 she assumed responsibility for the Department of Education where she inaugurated the monthly New Member Letters. Ms. Hanson was also the president of the Mid-Atlantic Federation, a frequent lecturer, author of the study guide *An Introduction to The Mahatma Letters*, and co-author of *Readers Guide to The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*.

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FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: (References to article are by page and paragraph.)

1. What are some intangible benefits of studying the Three Fundamental Propositions, irrespective of any immediate practical applications they may have? (47.3)
2. How would you go about testing the validity of each of the Propositions?
3. How might the first Fundamental Proposition provide some practical benefit to you in your life? Consider the second and third Propositions in the same light.
4. There is ample evidence pointing to the fact that various Adepts were involved in the writing of *The Secret Doctrine*. Does this knowledge have any affect upon the way in which you view the teachings found in *The Secret Doctrine*? (48.1)
5. What are “the deific powers in man”? (52.3)
6. Consider whether the following quote by Chesterson (quoted in the last paragraph) might have any bearing on how to approach the study of *The Secret Doctrine*: “You can only find truth with logic if you have already found truth without it.”

EXCERPT FROM *THE SECRET DOCTRINE* —

There is a method in the succession of events, and in the relation of co-existent things, which the mind of man seizes hold of; and by means of this as a clue, he runs back or forward over aeons of material history of which human experience can never testify. Events germinate and unfold. They have a past which is connected with their present, and we feel a well-justified confidence that a future is appointed which will be similarly connected with the present and the past. This continuity and unity of history repeat themselves before our eyes in all conceivable stages of progress. The phenomena furnish us the grounds for the generalization of two laws which are truly principles of scientific divination, by which alone the human mind penetrates the sealed records of the past and the unopened pages of the future. The first of these is the law of evolution, or, to phrase it for our purpose, the law of correlated successiveness or organized history in the individual, illustrated in the changing phrases of every single maturing system of results. . . . These thoughts summon into our immediate presence the measureless past and the measureless future of material history. They seem almost to open vistas through infinity, and to endow the human intellect with an existence and a vision exempt from the limitations of time and space and finite causation, and lift it up toward a sublime apprehension of the Supreme Intelligence whose dwelling place is Eternity. (1:638)

(In the above excerpt, Blavatsky is quoting from *World-Life* by Alexander Winchell, a book still available through Amazon.)

THE INSPIRATION OF *THE SECRET DOCTRINE*

By Torre Whorf

Published in the September 1950 issue of *The American Theosophist*.

Written by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (HPB) and first published in 1888, *The Secret Doctrine* is a unique book in Theosophical literature because of its tremendous scope in the realms of occultism. Mme. Blavatsky has gathered together in these few volumes the “oldest tenets” of the scriptures of Asiatic and European religions and drawn aside part of the veil which had, until 1888, hidden these tenets in symbolism.

At first glance the book may seem almost incomprehensible, so cosmic is it in its approach. The words may baffle and confuse many a reader, but if they persist in their efforts, while using their intuition and seeking the meaning behind the words; if they go beyond those words to the reality which inspired them, then they find that this book may open new doors into a clear and impersonal world of dazzling light which inspires them with its glory and radiance. It is this inner beauty which inspires me and which I hope will inspire you.

Since HPB covers such a wide range of subjects in these volumes, the index (which has been compiled in a separate volume) is of great assistance. The reader may then consult *The Secret Doctrine* much as one would an encyclopedia. However, the more research one does in this way, the more one becomes impressed with the method HPB employs in her explanations. She always leads us back to the very beginnings of this universe, impressing us with the idea of the One Reality, the source of all things. For she feels that if we have not some intuition of that “Immutable PRINCIPLE” which lies at the root of manifestation, we will be unable to comprehend the laws of nature or our own place in the scheme of things. Without some understanding of this Principle, however incomplete our understanding must necessarily be, we cannot conceive of brotherhood as a fact in nature. It is a fact because of the fundamental unity of the universe. We are each a spark of the Divine Flame, that flame to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken. Though countless souls emanate from the One, the One itself remains undiminished like a flame from which any number of sparks may be lighted. We are brothers and sisters in that we are essentially small flames lighted from the One Flame, sharing an immortal journey to reunite ourselves with our Source. And to understand our relationship with one another, we need to understand as much as we can about that Source and the steps along the Way of Return to It.

HPB says of this One Absolute Reality (the basis of both Spirit and Matter) that it is “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 . . .

‘unthinkable and unspeakable.’”¹ It has been known by various names in different religions: the Unknown, the Incognizable, the Causeless Cause, the Great Circle, Ain Soph, Parabrahman, and others. All of these names try to convey something of the mystery of what is being named, but all necessarily fail for it is impossible to name the Unnamable. It cannot be known as pure Essence, but can only be approached through its Aspects. The Essence lies hidden in Darkness, “the eternal matrix in which the sources of light appear and disappear.”² For what appears to us as Light in all its glory is, in reality, “merely a mass of shadows, as it can never be eternal, and is simply an illusion or Maya.”³

The two Aspects of this Principle may be thought of as the Self and the Not-Self, a fundamental duality underlying all things. There is nothing which cannot be classified either as the Self or the Not-Self, Being or Non-Being. HPB says that the Absolute may be thought of as pre-cosmic Ideation, which “supplies the guiding intelligence in the vast scheme of cosmic evolution,”⁴ and as pre-cosmic Substance, which is the basis of the various gradations of matter in all Universes. In other words, this Essence contains both Absolute Being and Non-Being, while at the same time ever remaining the Unknown and Unknowable, dual in Aspect though essentially One.

In order for a Universe to come into manifestation, an interplay occurs between the Self and the Not-Self, which then become Cosmic Ideation and Cosmic Substance. It is between these two poles that “FATHER-MOTHER SPIN A WEB WHOSE UPPER END IS FASTENED TO SPIRIT—THE LIGHT OF THE ONE DARKNESS—AND THE LOWER ONE TO ITS SHADOWY END, MATTER.”⁵ We may think of these two Aspects as Spirit and Matter, Subject and Object, Purusha and Prakriti, but we must ever realize that they are not to be thought of as separate from the One. The two Aspects are symbols of the Absolute which itself is the basis of conditioned Being, whether spirit or matter. Both are essential to the manifestation of the Universe; neither could exist without the other. Without spirit, matter could only be an empty abstraction; without matter, spirit would have no vehicle through which to express itself. The two are equally necessary to the emergence of Consciousness.

We therefore see that this duality is basic to the universe, and knowing the truth of the old aphorism, “As above, so below,” we may find expression of this duality in our own lives. For example, we must all use words to clothe our thoughts so that we may communicate with one another. The artist must capture the impulse of her creative spirit in a suitable form in order for artistic expression to occur. Ideas or inspirations are translated by the scientist into material forms to benefit, or destroy, mankind. We may observe this duality continually expressing itself in these ordinary ways; and if we know something of the ancient wisdom, these everyday revelations of the wondrous workings of the Divine Plan inspire us with their beautiful order. All forms are vitally important to the Life that ensouls them, but it is equally important that a balance be maintained, so that neither spirit overbalances matter, nor matter overbalances spirit. It is the release of the lower to the higher

which we seek, and we may succeed in accomplishing this by treading the middle way between the two opposites.

In the field of manifestation, we find that there is a relationship between Cosmic Ideation and Cosmic Substance; consequently the basic duality becomes a no-less-basic trinity. What, then, is this relationship that links subject to object, Spirit to Matter? It is Life itself. Life is a bridge “by which the ‘Ideas’ existing in the ‘Divine Thought’ are impressed on Cosmic Substance as ‘The Laws of Nature.’”⁶ In Theosophical literature, this bridge is called Fohat, a cosmic electricity that reacts between Spirit and Matter, just as electricity in our material world flows between positive and negative poles. Spirit and Matter may be thought of as Consciousness and Energy, respectively, while Fohat may be thought of as Life. Fohat acts upon all Being, whether Cosmic, human, or terrestrial, electrifying every atom into Life, impressing all matter with the Divine Thought. Not a particle of matter exists, however small, that is not imbued with this hidden Life. HPB tells us that Fohat in the manifested Universe “is that occult, electric, vital power, which, under the Will of the Creative Logos, unites and brings together all forms, giving them the first impulse, which in time becomes law.”⁷ This is the Force which brings together the elemental atoms causing them to combine and aggregate. Not only is Fohat “the living Symbol and Container of that Force, but it is looked upon by the Occultists as an Entity.”⁸ This Entity is the combined Dhyan Chohans, Archangels, Seraphs, etc., who are the invisible Architects of the visible world; for there is nothing visible which is without unseen forces behind it, just as our individual actions are the result of our invisible thoughts. Thus we find that there is a constant rhythmic process of the invisible becoming visible according to the Divine Plan, and this process occurs through the action of Fohat.

What is our relation to this threefold manifested Universe as human beings? “From Spirit, or Cosmic Ideation, comes our consciousness: from Cosmic Substance the several vehicles in which that consciousness is individualized and attains to self—or reflective—consciousness.”⁹ Our higher vehicles emanate from the basic duality, and vivified by Fohat, our lower vehicles reflect the higher. “THE SPARK HANGS FROM THE FLAME BY THE FINEST THREAD OF FOHAT. IT JOURNEYS THROUGH THE SEVEN WORLDS OF MAYA. IT STOPS IN THE FIRST AND IS A METAL OR STONE; IT PASSES TO THE SECOND, AND BEHOLD—A PLANT; THE PLANT WHIRLS THROUGH SEVEN CHANGES AND BECOMES A SACRED ANIMAL. FROM THE COMBINED ATTRIBUTES OF THESE, MANU, THE THINKER, IS FORMED.”¹⁰

This is a beautiful description of our evolution as a divine Spark through the lower worlds into our present human state. Self-consciousness cannot be born until the Spark has been through every elemental form in the manifested world, until experience of all those forms has been impressed upon the evolving life. In the limitation which this life undergoes as a mineral, it learns to express itself in wondrous geometrical forms through crystallization. Sometimes we see this mineral life anticipating the next stage in evolution, the plant kingdom, by creating mineral forms which resemble trees or ferns. If we are sensitive to the

One Life, which is present in all things whatever the stage in evolution, we may be aware of the life struggling to free itself from its present form, to find new ways of self-revelation. In this way the evolving life experiences the utmost in the mineral kingdom and is reborn into the lowest form of plant life, there to continue its self-discovery.

Thus the Life reaches out and widens its expression, and these expressions are the beauties of nature that surround us. The tiniest leaf or flower is a perfect revelation of the Divine Life, which fashioned it according to natural law. The flower fades, the leaf drops from the tree, but the Life which formed it goes on creating new leaves and more beautiful flowers, ever seeking to build more perfect forms that will come nearer to the Archetypes existing in the Divine Mind. The laws of nature reveal a rhythmic, harmonious process at work, ever demonstrating that a perfect order reigns supreme, that nothing within the Universe can be without this order, this inherent geometry. This is our inspiration. The world is not a “fortuitous concurrence of atoms” but an orderly process, and we are a part of this order.

The life of the plant then moves up another step on this great ladder of evolution and eons later is born into the lowest form of animal life. Here again the life must experience completely the life of progressively higher animal forms until it has reached the point where individualization occurs. When this point is reached, a marvelous thing happens. A stream of Divine Consciousness descends from the Spirit and unites with the Spark of life that has been evolving through these lower kingdoms; at that moment an individuality, a self-conscious Ego is born.

Thus our human journey begins in a primitive body that may be very close to the animals in its tendencies, but is far removed from the animal kingdom by virtue our being imbued with this divine heritage of self-consciousness. This consciousness has been unaware throughout the lower worlds of experience, moved only by natural impulse towards the higher. Now we are given the opportunity to consciously work with the Divine Plan, using our powers to further the evolution of Life, Form, and Consciousness.

Humanity is unique because of self-consciousness. It is absolutely necessary that all Souls learn to cooperate with the Divine, while in physical bodies, in order to attain Divinity themselves. Hence the Soul reincarnates in body after body to gain experience, and through eons of time slowly learns to discriminate from those experiences—to value the higher and spiritual above the personal. She learns this through constantly creating causes that have their subsequent effects; forces are set into motion, bringing pleasure or pain according to our motives, actions, and feelings. The painful experiences teach us that we are not working in accordance with the laws of nature; we are acting unnaturally, and it is necessary for us to learn that unnatural actions can only reap the reward of pain. So the great Wheel turns and we are bound to it by our thirst for more experience.

If we discover the laws which govern us, we may work in accordance with them and so hasten our evolution. HPB says that “man ought to be ever striving to help the divine

evolution of *Ideas*, by becoming, to the best of his ability, a *co-worker with Nature* in the cyclic task.”¹¹ *The Secret Doctrine* helps us to evaluate our experiences in the light of these occult laws. It gives us a perspective from which we may look at ourselves and the Universe from the point of view of natural order, instead of from the point of view of utter chaos. And seeing that this order is constantly evolving towards a more beautiful expression, we are thrilled with the vision of the future. We feel that we are part of a cosmic process that reveals to us the beauties of the earth and of the Spirit; we long to identify ourselves with it, expressing only the beautiful in our own lives. We worship the Great Unknown which has “its shrine and altar on the holy and ever untrodden ground of our heart—invisible, intangible, unmentioned, save through the ‘still small voice’ of our spiritual consciousness. Those who worship before it ought to do so in the silence and sanctified solitude of their Souls; making their spirit the sole mediator between them and the *Universal Spirit*, their good actions the only priests, and their sinful intentions the only visible and objective sacrificial victims to the *Presence*.”¹² Thus we bring the knowledge of the basis of the Universe into our lives and aspirations that it may help us become a “co-worker with Nature.”

In order for mankind to reunite itself with the One Essence, it must undergo purification in the fire of suffering, which our experience in these lower worlds brings. As men and women, we must learn from experience the Law of Sacrifice, another of the great laws which govern us. It requires us to sacrifice our lower natures so that we may come to know our higher. For it is only by being crucified that we may be resurrected. It is only through sacrifice that we may bridge the gap between our lower nature—body and psyche—and our higher principles—Soul and Spirit.

The human psyche consists of our emotions and our concrete mind; our Soul is the reincarnating Ego, which is the abstract mind combined with intuition and will. The great task lies in the bridging of these two “selves,” for without the Soul, the lower bodies are lost and finally disintegrate. But the Soul also needs the lower personality in which to express itself, so there must be a union of the two. Difficulties present themselves, however, for the lower vehicles are composed of matter which seeks sensation—any kind of sensation—because it makes our vehicles feel more alive. As a result, there is a constant war between our personalities, which want to think of themselves as being proudly separate, and our real selves—our Souls—which are trying to build a temple for the expression of the Divine Life. Our daily lives are the battlefields on which are fought our individual battles of Kurukshetra. The Divine Ego is immortal by its very nature, but it is only through the transmutation of the lower nature into the higher that the terrestrial ego may win his immortality. Therefore, we must be ever on the alert so that we do not vivify the terrestrial passions of anger, hate, pride, fear, ambition and so on, for they lead us away from our goal; they widen the gap between the personality and the Soul. The Soul uses the personality in the same way that the Divine Mind uses natural laws—as tools in the unfolding of consciousness. We are in our very essence Sparks of the One Flame, expressions of the two poles of Nature, and as such we should use the tool of personality wisely, revealing the hidden beauty within, not

distorting it. Our personalities should add to the Song of Life their particular notes, fitting into the divine harmony, making the song more vibrant, more beautiful. And this is to me the greatest inspiration, this song of which we are an integral part, however discordant our note. For what could be more thrilling than to add a measure more of beauty to the Divine Song through making our own lives more beautiful?

In short, the adventure is to tread the Path to the world of the Spirit, that Path which the Hindus call Antahkarana. This is the razor-edged path which is spoken of in the Bible when it is said, "Strait is the gate which leads unto life eternal." We pass through that gate when we aspire towards the Higher Ego. It is the "only connecting link during life between the two minds—the higher consciousness of the Ego and the human intelligence of the lower mind."¹³

If we can once grasp the idea that the only Reality is that which the Hindus call Param-atma and Parabrahman, then we may begin to comprehend these metaphysical truths concerning the constitution of the human being and the Universe. This one "ever-existing Root Essence" is unknown by the physical senses, but is clearly perceptible to the spiritual nature. We must further conceive of ourselves as having emanated from this omnipresent, universal, eternal Principle, and know that we must return to it one day.

With this understanding we may grasp that "life and death, good and evil, past and future, are all empty words, or at best, figures of speech."¹⁴ Since the objective universe itself is finite, having a beginning and an ending, and is therefore transitory, then both life and death are but aspects and illusions. "They are changes of state, in fact, and no more. Real life is in the spiritual consciousness of that life, *in a conscious existence in Spirit, not Matter*; and real death is the limited perception of life, the impossibility of sensing conscious or even individual existence outside of form, or at least, of some form of Matter."¹⁵ It is our task to become really alive according to HPB's definition, and in this great adventure into the Unknown, we have *The Secret Doctrine* to help us. This book is like the North Star shedding its light upon the weary traveler, showing which way to go. It is a guidepost along the way, our help and our inspiration.

In closing, let us recall what HPB said concerning our Higher Selves:

"You cannot invoke this Divine Witness [the HIGHER SELF] with impunity, and once that you have put yourselves under its tutelage, you have asked the Radiant Light to shine and search through all the dark corners of your being; consciously you have invoked the divine justice of Karma to take note of your motives, to scrutinize your actions, and to enter up all in your account. The step is irrevocable as that of the infant taking birth. Never again can you force yourselves back into the Matrix of Avidya and irresponsibility . . . Though you flee to the uttermost parts of the earth, and hide yourselves from the sight of men, or seek oblivion in the tumult of the social whirl, that Light will find you out and lighten your every thought, word, and deed. All [HPB] can do is send to each earnest one among you a most sincerely fraternal sympathy and hope for a good outcome to your endeavors. Nevertheless, be not

discouraged, but try, ever keep trying; twenty failures are not irremediable if followed by as many undaunted struggles upward: is it not so that mountains are climbed? And know further, that if Karma relentlessly records in the Esotericist's account bad deeds that in the ignorant would be overlooked, yet, equally true is it that each of his good deeds is, by reason of his association with the Higher Self, a hundredfold intensified as a potentiality for good.”¹⁶

“Finally, keep ever in mind the Consciousness that though you see no Master by your bedside, nor hear one audible whisper in the silence of the still night, yet the Holy Power is about you, the Holy Light is shining into your hour of Spiritual need and aspirations.”¹⁷

Torre Whorf is the daughter of James Perkins, who was president of The Theosophical Society in America from 1945-1960.

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FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: (References to article are by page and paragraph.)

1. Give some examples beyond those listed by the author of how the “fundamental duality underlying all things” (56.1) expresses itself at the human level.
2. What is it that distinguishes the human being from other forms of life on this planet? Why is this so important? (58.4)
3. What are we to learn from the Law of Sacrifice? (59.1)

EXCERPTS FROM *THE SECRET DOCTRINE* —

The first lesson taught in esoteric philosophy is, that the incognizable Cause does not put forth evolution, whether consciously or unconsciously, but only exhibits periodically *different aspects of itself* to the perception of *finite* Minds. (2:487)

The radical unity of the ultimate essence of each constituent part of compounds in Nature—from Star to mineral Atom, from the highest Dhyāni-Chohan to the smallest infusoria, in the fullest acceptance of the term, and whether applied to the spiritual, intellectual, or physical worlds—this is the one fundamental law in Occult Science. (1:120)

Nature geometrizes universally in all her manifestations. There is an inherent law—not only in the primordial, but also in the manifested matter of our phenomenal plane—by which Nature correlates her geometrical forms, and later, also, her compound elements; and in which there is no place for accident or chance.” (1:97)

Fohat, then, is the personified electric vital power, the transcendental binding Unity of all Cosmic Energies, on the unseen as on the manifested planes, the action of which resembles—on an immense scale—that of a living Force created by WILL, in those phenomena where the seemingly subjective acts on the seemingly objective and propels it to action. (1:111)

Three distinct representations of the Universe in its three distinct aspects are impressed upon our thought by the esoteric philosophy: the PRE-EXISTING (evolved from) the EVER-EXISTING; and the PHENOMENAL—the world of illusion, the reflection, and shadow thereof. (1:278)

SEED THOUGHTS FOR MEDITATION:

- ”There is nothing visible which is without unseen forces behind it, just as our individual actions are the result of our invisible thoughts.”
- “The tiniest leaf or flower is a perfect revelation of the Divine Life.”

ACTION ITEM

- As the author suggests, one way of using *The Secret Doctrine* is to use it as an encyclopedia. Spend some time looking up topics of interest in the index.

THE SECRET DOCTRINE AND ITS STUDY

By Joy Mills

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From time to time, members (individually or in groups) feel that a study of *The Secret Doctrine* is imperative to the deeper pursuit of Theosophical understanding. Such a feeling is both legitimate and justifiable, for until we have come to a contemplation of those universals of the wisdom upon which *The Secret Doctrine* is based, we are as children playing with the mosaics of experience, unperceiving of the magnificent pattern out of which they have emerged. Only as these mosaics are referable to immortal principles can they find their usefulness in applications that are life-releasing.

As search for the jewels of wisdom is undertaken, certain questions arise quite naturally concerning the study of *The Secret Doctrine*. Where do we begin, and how do we proceed? There are as many approaches to the wisdom as there are students, but it may not be amiss to suggest a path whose traversing has proved exciting to one student. It was Plato who said that he was not wise, *sophos*, but a lover of wisdom, *philo Sophia*. Here, too, there is no claim to wisdom, but only the love of the chase in pursuit of wisdom. *The Secret Doctrine* is a life-time study; its pages are not the end of understanding, but channel markers leading to the oceans of universal truth whose reaches stretch to the distant horizons of wisdom. Before we become master mariners, however, we must necessarily learn some principles of navigation.

How do we study, then? The reading of any book does not constitute its study. One may read through a great many books and still know very little. To study is to come to grips with the author's thought, with the ideas, the understanding, the illumination that the author has expressed. To study is to permit the ideas to permeate without prejudice, without any obstruction, into one's own mind, heart and intuition, so that truth meets truth, the truth in the book meeting the truth of one's own inner being.

Generally we throw up all sorts of obstructions—non-belief, incredulity, and so on. We pit our minds against the author's in a tug-of-war that results only in misconceptions and misunderstanding. The mind may critically examine—indeed, that is one of its primary functions—but if that critical examination is based on preconceived notions, on prejudices, on psychological impediments, then there is not the true examination and certainly not an openness to the pursuit or the perception of truth. To use a well-known phrase, we must “open the doors of the mind” to truth, and the interior evaluation proceeds from a deeper source than the examining mind itself. To study, then, is to align the truth without to the truth perceived within, utilizing every faculty of our being in this process of harmonization.

On this concept of study, the following suggestions for approaching *The Secret Doctrine* are based. For the end of our studies is not that we shall be able to say in parrot-like fashion, “HPB said . . .” or “*The Secret Doctrine* says . . .” Rather, the end (which is paradoxically the beginning) is that we shall have engaged ourselves wholly and without reservation in the creative encounter with truth that alone can carry us into that realm where the transcendental wisdom is perceived and known.

In the short work by the Countess Constance Wachtmeister and others, *Reminiscences of H.P. Blavatsky and The Secret Doctrine*, Bertram Keightley states:

When studied thoroughly but not treated as a revelation, when understood and assimilated, but not made a text for dogma, HPB’s *Secret Doctrine* will be found of incalculable value, and will furnish suggestions, clues, and threads of guidance for the study of Nature and Man, such as no other existing work can supply.¹

What, then, is *The Secret Doctrine*? This must be our first question if we are to find in it those “suggestions, clues, and threads of guidance” that will aid us in our quest of truth. HPB herself indicated that the written pages contain only a small fragment of the Esoteric Doctrine known to the higher members of the Occult Brotherhood. It contains, as she pointed out, “all that can be given out to the world in this century,” and she adds concerning the “Secret Archaic Doctrine” that “it will be centuries before much more is given out.” Yet we must also remember that HPB warned us that her work contained many blinds, often concealing as much as was revealed.

In talks with her own class, given in London during the years 1888 to 1891, notes of which have come to us from one of her students, Robert Bowen, HPB said:

Reading *The Secret Doctrine* page by page as one reads any other book will only end in confusion. The first thing to do, even if it takes years, is to get some grasp of the Three Fundamental Principles given in the Proem.

Then she says further:

If one imagines that one is going to get a satisfactory picture of the constitution of the universe from *The Secret Doctrine*, one will get only confusion from its study. It is not meant to give any such final verdict on existence, but to lead towards the Truth. Come to *The Secret Doctrine* without any hope of getting the final Truth of existence from it, or with any idea other than seeing how far it may lead towards the Truth. See in its study a means of exercising and developing the mind never touched by other studies.

We may conceive of *The Secret Doctrine* as a basic reference work which one may approach again and again. To know and appreciate it fully, however, demands first that one be familiar to some extent with the life of HPB herself and the way in which she worked. At the outset of any individual or class study, it would be well to give some attention to this matter, acquainting oneself with some of the pertinent material concerning HPB. In this connection, one reference is highly significant for our understanding of *The Secret Doctrine*.

In *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, Second Series, edited by C. Jinarajadasa, four letters received by Dr. Hubbe Schleiden, an early member of the Society in Germany, are transcribed. One of these letters, dated 1885, contains this important clue for our study: "It is for his own satisfaction [that is, Dr. Schleiden's] that the undersigned is happy to assure him that *The Secret Doctrine* when ready will be the triple production of M., Upasika and the Doctor's most humble servant. K. H." (Mr. Jinarajadasa comments on this letter that the reference is to the first recension of *The Secret Doctrine*, the original manuscript of which is at Adyar, and that the work as published was expanded by HPB to several times the original draft.) The letter from KH clearly indicates that, as HPB herself stated, she was aided in writing her major work by her Adept teacher, Morya, and his great brother, KH.

It has been said that *The Secret Doctrine* should be read with the will, and indeed one does find that it cannot be read with the ordinary mind. To say that it should be read by the will, however, does not mean that we should read it with bursting blood vessels. Rather we may take this to mean that the light of Atma, the illumination of the Self, should be allowed to shine upon our understanding. Our preparation must be such that we have invited the will to illumine our knowledge. Towards this end, our studies might be accompanied by meditation and contemplation upon those immortal stanzas in *The Voice of the Silence*, which HPB herself recommended as a correlative study to *The Secret Doctrine*. Only with such preparation may one enter inwardly into the depths of the Doctrine. Again, it is not that the mind is set aside, but that the mind has become the pure reflecting mirror for the higher Self to perceive the universals of Reality.

As we come to the volumes with such outer and inner preparation as we can achieve, we may look a little more closely at the purpose of HPB's great work, perceiving also something of its meaning for us. In the preface to Volume I, HPB summarized her purpose in part: "The aim of this work may be thus stated: to show that Nature is not 'a fortuitous concurrence of atoms,' and to assign to man his rightful place in the scheme of the Universe. . ."²

In her *Studies in The Secret Doctrine*, Mrs. Josephine Ransom suggests a practicality of the art of dealing with ourselves. "Do not try to make that practicality fit only into the physical world, essential though that is. It is true of all worlds. Let us try to comprehend something of the inner worlds, of the operations of those worlds as suggested in these studies of *The Secret Doctrine*. Thus will we comprehend something of the stupendous inner values of the universe. Let us know something of the metaphysics of the universe, for there the Monad is at work in its own realm."³ It is with this in mind, with this inner attitude, that one is prepared to enter into that contemplation of eternals which is the study of *The Secret Doctrine*.

There are four things students may discover as they pursue their studies. First, *The Secret Doctrine* indicates that through the comparison of the cosmogonies of the ancients, a perception of true universals may be obtained. Next, it gives a clue with which to unravel the genuine racial history of mankind. Third, it lifts the veil of allegory and symbol to reveal the

beauty of truth in all its manifestations. Finally, *The Secret Doctrine* presents to the eager intellect, to the intuition and to the developed spiritual perception, the scientific secrets of the universe for our total apprehension.

Our approach, then, that we may explore and discover this fourfold vision, may well be in consonance with the method suggested by HPB herself. A thorough acquaintance with the Three Fundamental Propositions is necessary. Quite simply stated, these reveal to us the mysteries of BE-NESS, BE-COMING and BE-ING. Exploring these Propositions, we find ourselves entering the realm of Reality, from which emerge all laws, all principles, upon which the manifested universe is based. The conceptualizations of Theosophical knowledge find in these three majestic fundamentals, in this triumvirate of Truth, their final validation and confirmation. All principles, all the diversity of manifestation, are referable to these universals. So it is here, I think, we must make our beginning.

Madame Blavatsky then suggested that we “follow that up by the study of the Recapitulation”—the numbered items in the “Summing Up” at the conclusion of Volume I.⁴ Here we find six outstanding ideas, which are necessary for our understanding of the entire *Secret Doctrine*. First, of course, is the fact that the Esoteric Doctrine is “the accumulated Wisdom of the Ages . . . [an] uninterrupted record” which has come down to us, traced in allegory and symbol, couched in myth and legend, perceptible always to those who desire perception. Second, we are reminded that the fundamental law of the esoteric philosophy is the unity of all things: “‘Substance’ on the plane of the manifested Universe . . . a ‘Principle’ in the beginningless and endless, abstract, visible and invisible SPACE.” We are next reminded of the universal principle of rhythmic unfoldment, cyclic manifestation taking place at every level. The fourth concept introduces us to one of the great mysteries of the esoteric philosophy, the ephemeral nature of all *ex*-istence, the doctrine of maya, unfortunately so often misunderstood. For maya is less illusion, in our ordinary understanding of that word, than it is the measured pace of manifestation. The root word here is *ma*, which means to measure, and the out-turned energies of a Creative Logos result, quite simply, in a measured order, which in the physical world reach their closest confinements in the measurements of time and space. Maya in its highest sense is the creative aspect of reality; not an illusion, it is the producer of all illusory forms, of appearance, change and transitoriness, and is actually the revealer of the spirit that inspires all forms. As HPB points out: “. . . the Universe is real enough to the conscious beings in it,”⁵ for “the illusion of him who is in himself an illusion differs on every plane of consciousness.”⁶ Consciousness is the measured perception of the one “Substance-Principle,” and when measurement ceases, consciousness has moved into the immeasurable Absolute, becoming no-consciousness, the state beautifully described in the First Stanza and the commentary thereon.

The fifth concept of the Recapitulation reminds us that “Everything in the Universe . . . is CONSCIOUS.” It is the development of consciousness that provides the purposefulness of manifestation, and the doctrine of maya takes on new meaning for us. HPB points out later that

“the experience on any plane is an actuality for the percipient being, whose consciousness is on that plane . . .”⁷ From this point, we may rightly move in our studies to a consideration of Part II of Vol. I, especially the section on “Primordial Substance and Divine Thought,” wherein we are brought face to face with the ordering of the evolutionary process, Cosmic Energy (Fohat) measuring out Cosmic Substance (Akasha) under the directives of Cosmic Ideation (Ma-hat). Thus the sixth great concept emerges, as HPB summarizes it in her Recapitulation: “The Universe is worked and *guided*, from *within outwards*.”

Pondering the universals which are thus set forth for us, we may now move freely through the volumes, seeing the outworking of the great conceptualizations in terms of cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis, finding endless excitement in the correspondences that emerge as we explore the depths of meaning in the universal symbols of creation reflected in the life and heart of man. Pursuing our studies by exploring the many jewels of the wisdom or by tracing out the algebraic formula of creation given us in the Stanzas, we find ourselves, as the *Rig Veda* puts it, “gazing into eternity ere the foundations of the world were laid.”

In our study, we come at last to the ultimate and sublime truth: the Cosmic Logos, the Creative Energy of our Solar System, and the Self in Man, the Inner Ruler Immortal, are ONE. This is the goal of yoga; this is the cosmic religious experience; this is the supreme vision of the mystic. As we remember this profound truth, the deeper awareness of our unity not only with all manifested life but with the very sources of that life becomes the abiding principle from which we move. We discover that the pattern of creation, of the Universe and of the Human, resides within the very fiber of our being. It is for us to reveal in conscious yoga that pattern of creation. The Doctrine is then our own—secret not so much because it is hidden, but because its very inwardness is inexpressible. The throbbing heartbeat of the Real is matched perfectly within ourselves; and humanity, the microcosm, mirrors the cosmic creative scheme.

A Japanese sage, half a world away in space and centuries removed in time, said: “Do not try to do what your predecessors did; rather seek what they sought.” To study *The Secret Doctrine* in its fullness, to enter creatively into the encounter with immortal wisdom, is to come to HPB’s work with open heart and mind, seeking what has been sought by the wise ones through the ages, following the injunction given by HPB herself: “Follow not me, nor my Path, but the Path I show, which leads to the Masters.”

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3. Ransom, *Studies in The Secret Doctrine*, TPH, Wheaton, 1934, pp. 172-2.
4. Blavatsky, vol. 1, pp. 269-79.
5. Blavatsky, vol. 1, p. 274.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 329.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 296.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: (References to article are by page and paragraph.)

1. Why is “mosaic” an apt way to describe our life’s experiences? (63.1)
2. According to the author’s definition of what it means to study, what is the difference between just reading a book and studying that book? Are there some books worth reading but not studying? Give examples. (63.3)
3. Bertram Keightley says *The Secret Doctrine* will be of “incalculable value” if we study it thoroughly. If we treated it as a revelation, which he advises against, how might that affect our relationship to the book? (64.3)
4. Joy Mills quotes Josephine Ransom who encourages us not to limit the practicality of this study to the material world. Can you provide an example to illustrate her point? (65.3)
5. Correlate the following terms to the Three Fundamental Propositions: BE-NESS, BE-COMING, and BE-ING. Refer to earlier lessons on the Propositions if necessary. (66.1)
6. Does the author’s description of Maya differ from your previous understanding of the word? (66.2)

EXCERPT FROM *THE SECRET DOCTRINE* —

The flashing gaze of those seers has penetrated into the very kernel of matter, and recorded the soul of things there, where an ordinary profane, however learned, would have perceived but the external work of form. But modern science believes not in the “soul of things,” and hence will reject the whole system of ancient cosmogony. It is useless to say that the system in question is no fancy of one or several isolated individuals. That it is the uninterrupted record covering thousands of generations of Seers whose respective experiences were made to test and to verify the traditions passed orally by one early race to another, of the teachings of higher and exalted beings, who watched over the childhood of Humanity. (1:272-73)

ACTION ITEM:

- Read and study the “Summing Up” portion of *The Secret Doctrine*. (pp. 1:269-79)

TRUTH IN THE LIGHT OF *THE SECRET DOCTRINE*

By Hermine Sabetay

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Madame Blavatsky has defined her great work *The Secret Doctrine* as a “Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy.” In ancient times, these three aspects were not separated, but integrated in universal esoteric wisdom. Such is not the case in our time. Science is still predominantly materialistic, although there are some eminent thinkers who have made a breach in the structure of modern science by perceiving the action of Spirit or cosmic thought in Nature. But these scientists, who are more far-sighted than others, are still in a minority and their concepts have rarely penetrated into university faculties. “Official” science is still dominated by materialistic ideas, and in this vast domain the message of H. P. Blavatsky has not yet been understood. HPB says that formerly “philosophers were scientists and philosophy was a real science—not simply verbiage, as it is in our day.”¹ Besides, the term *philosophy*, habitually interpreted as “love of wisdom,” should rather be translated as love’s wisdom, Divine Love, that omnipresent and universal radiance pervading all manifestations. Love in its exoteric sense has been degraded by man in its purely earthly applications.

As for “religion,” we find this word in “There is no Religion higher than Truth,” the motto of the Maharaja of Benares that the Theosophical Society adopted. None of the many religions which exist in the world upholds Truth because they conform to dogmas and beliefs invented by man. During the early periods of its development all mankind had only one religion, the Wisdom-Religion, the origin and source of the many beliefs which have appeared in the course of time:

. . . the first, semi-divine, pure and spiritual Races of Humanity . . . had the “truths of God” and lived up to them, and their ideals. They preserved them, so long as there was hardly any evil, and hence scarcely a possible abuse of that knowledge and those truths. But evolution and the gradual fall into materiality is also one of the “truths” and also one of the laws of “God.” And as mankind progressed and became with every generation more of the earth, earthly, the individuality of each temporary Ego began to assert itself. It is personal selfishness that develops and urges man on to abuse of his knowledge and power. . . . Hence the necessity of gradually taking away from man the divine knowledge and power, which became with every new human cycle more dangerous . . .²

However, the original “truths of God” did not entirely disappear.

The need of veiling truth to protect it from desecration becoming more apparent with every generation, a thin veil was used at first, which had to be gradually

thickened according to the spread of personality and selfishness, and this led to the Mysteries.³

Henceforward the knowledge of the primeval truths remained entirely in the hands of the Initiates.⁴

The goal of the Mysteries was to teach the principles of the primordial Wisdom in allegorical and symbolical forms only to those who showed themselves worthy. These sacred institutions were presided over by Hierophants who, at the beginning, were true Initiates and Adepts. The divine truths were transmitted under the seal of secrecy from one generation to the next.

Thus, from a far distant past, it was the custom to keep secret the higher truths, while the masses contented themselves with exoteric cults which, in the course of time, became very much modified. HPB says modern religions are “an exoteric veil thrown over the face of esoteric truth. . . . This alone ought to show that no religious work now extant can be understood without the help of the Archaic wisdom, the primitive foundation on which they were all built.”⁵

Christianity itself has its roots in earlier religions. “For surely, no man once he devotes himself to such comparative studies, can regard the religion of the West in any light but that of a pale and enfeebled copy of older and nobler philosophies.”⁶ In the only letter of the Mahachohan we read:

That the world is in such a bad condition morally is a conclusive evidence that none of its religions and philosophies—those of the *civilized* races less than any other—have ever possessed the *truth*.

HPB also points out that the occidental religions have lost their true significance and that antiquity knew the universal truths better.⁷ She says that “theological interpretation shows the gods and archangels standing as symbols for the dead-letter or dogmatic religions, as arrayed against the pure truths of Spirit, naked and unadorned with fancy.”⁸

Christianity in particular has eclipsed these pure truths. Christian dogma “obscures the facts and truths of the primitive wisdom of the ages.”⁹

Properly speaking, there is no Esoteric Christianity, no more than there is Esoteric Hinduism, Buddhism or any other “ism.” We know of one Esoteric doctrine—“the universal secret Wisdom-Religion” of old. The latter embraces every one of the great creeds of antiquity, while none of these can boast of having it in its entirety.¹⁰

And to finish this series of quotations, we may consider a prophecy which declares that just as the rising sun drives out the darkness, so the rays of the glorious truth will disperse the unwholesome mist of thousands of religious sects which now obscures it. The Truth will conquer in the end. However, as this prediction comes true, there will be innumerable errors until the great day. As HPB says: “Error runs down an inclined plane, while Truth has to laboriously climb its way up hill.”¹¹

These errors prevail during the transition. “Like an immense boa-constrictor, Error, in every shape, encircles mankind, trying to smother in her deadly coils every aspiration towards truth and light.”¹² It takes centuries for a proven truth to be accepted and become the common heritage of a people if it is against their prejudices and popular superstitions.

This last statement makes evident the fact that the public is not mature enough to accept the teachings of Theosophy. On this subject, it is worthwhile to quote the following lines which allude to a well-known episode in the *Pantagruel* of Rabelais:¹³

Mankind is at best a sorry herd of Panurgian sheep, following blindly the leader that happens to suit it at the moment. Mankind—the majority at any rate—hates to think for itself. It resents as an insult the humblest invitation to step for a moment outside the old well-beaten tracks, and, judging for itself, to enter into a new path in some fresh direction.¹⁴

Let us add that the great majority of people do not even suspect that there exist other ways of thinking than the current opinions of the masses.

Evidently it is not possible to communicate freely the Theosophical doctrines and we may recall in this regard the injunction not to throw pearls before swine (Matt. 7:6). From the remotest past, Initiates were under a sacred obligation never to reveal the higher teachings which were beyond the understanding of ignorant people.

Students of Theosophy know well the Three Truths set out in *Idyll of the White Lotus*, and in the precious little work *Light on the Path*, “three truths which are absolute and cannot be lost.” The first declares the immortality of the spirit of man as well as the inconceivable glory of his destiny. The second speaks of the principle of Divine Life which dwells in each of us. The third recalls the doctrine of Karma: “Each man is his own absolute law-giver, the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself; the decreer of his life, his reward and his punishment.” These three statements refer, in a few words, to the immortality of man, his divine nature, and his individual responsibility. They allude to reincarnation, evolution, the unity of life, the path, to the will and karma; they are also the most concise expression of the Divine Wisdom or Theosophy.

The basic idea of Theosophy is that of Absolute Truth. It is to this first of Three Fundamental Propositions that *The Secret Doctrine* points, namely “An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable PRINCIPLE.”¹⁵ This is the causeless Cause, infinite and eternal, the source of all existence. It is the Ultimate Reality, inaccessible to thought, and indefinable; this “*absolute* truth is not on earth and has to be searched for in higher regions . . . the kingdom of absolute truth is not of this world.”¹⁶

In the manifested world there are only relative truths. So even the teaching given through Theosophical doctrines consists only of these relative truths; they are however of great value, as they have as background the idea of one Absolute Being.

The manifested universe is penetrated by diverse forms of duality, such as subject and object, spirit and matter, as well as truth and its opposite, which includes error, ignorance, falsehood, and superstition. To this list can be added “illusion,” which is an important idea taught by various religious and philosophical systems of India under the name of *maya*. According to this doctrine, there is only one Reality, the supreme unmanifested Unity; all that exists in the visible and invisible worlds is the play of illusion. Especially is physical nature unreal, its appearances being produced by our deceptive sensory perceptions. The goal of this philosophy is to liberate us as quickly as possible from these illusory bonds so that we may find real and eternal happiness in union with the Divine Life which transcends all existence.

However, if we rely on the source of Indian thought, the Vedas, those ancient writings whose origins are lost in the distant past, we will not find such a negation of the physical world. On the contrary, the Vedic hymns express the joy of life in a universe full of charm and beauty. For those wise men of old, Nature in its infinite multiplicity is the physical body of Divinity and expresses the creative thought of the Divine Mind. The Upanishads, which form part of the Vedas, exalt the spiritual path, the aspiration to supreme Union, but one does not find there the thesis that the universe is unreal, a phantasmagoria of our senses. The dominant pantheistic note of these sublime poems is opposed to such a negative dogma. According to this view, the Divine Life pervades the entire Universe in such a way that God is both immanent and transcendent. It manifests itself in all living beings as also in apparently inanimate objects from subatomic particles to galaxies of inconceivable size. The essential doctrines of Theosophy conform to the pantheistic postulate.

The doctrine of *maya* has been expounded above all by the great Shankaracharya, whose fundamental thesis can be summed up thus: only Brahman, the Absolute Principle, is real; the universe, with its contents, is unreal. This results in a deprecatory attitude towards terrestrial things, in particular, towards the human body, the instrument and vehicle of the Soul and Spirit, which the Apostle Paul called the Temple of the Living God. Dominated by the idea that the physical world is illusory and that one must strive to escape from its illusions, the ideal of the Advaita system and the goal of the aspirant on the path of Yoga is to seek deliverance from its conditions through union with Brahman or Atman, to become free of the wheel of rebirth to live in the eternal happiness of Nirvana.

In this regard, it is appropriate to recall the words of the Mahachohan himself:

It is not the individual determined purpose of attaining for oneself Nirvana (the culmination of all knowledge and absolute wisdom) which is after all only an exalted and glorious *selfishness*—but the self-sacrificing pursuit of the best means to lead on the right path our neighbor, to cause as many of our fellow-creatures as we possibly can to benefit by it, which constitutes the true theosophist.¹⁷

Let us also remember *The Voice of the Silence*, whose central part describes the two paths: that of Liberation, which is the open path leading towards an egoistic happiness; and

the other, that of renunciation of eternal bliss, in order to help humanity to progress and to find the road of spirituality. The latter is the supreme Way called the *Secret Path*.

Strenuous efforts to achieve one's own liberation or "salvation" are motivated by egoistic desire, however sublimated it may be; it is forgetfulness of the ties of fraternity that attach us to the human race. Such aspiration seeks to escape the evolution foreseen by the Divine Plan, which implies a progressive development towards perfection through numerous earthly lives. Essentially, we are divine fragments, sparks of the Great Flame, engaged in a voyage of long duration, as described in the Third Proposition of *The Secret Doctrine*:

The fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul, the latter being itself an aspect of the Unknown Root; and the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul—a spark of the former—through the Cycle of Incarnation (or "Necessity") in accordance with Cyclic and Karmic Law, during the whole term.¹⁸

This pilgrimage involves periods of time of inconceivable length. We have to enrich ourselves through experiences of many kinds while passing through Races and sub-races, Globes, Rounds and Chains (or Manvantaras), in innumerable stages which provide the appropriate conditions for development of our latent spiritual faculties, till the glorious future of our destiny is reached. Thus, our cosmic voyage is without end, as stated in *Light on the Path*: "You will enter the light, but you will never touch the flame."

Hermine Sabetay (1901-1994) was born in Czechoslovakia and studied at universities in Germany, receiving her degree in chemistry from the University of Berlin. She spent much of her adult life serving the Theosophical Society while living in Paris. Her writings have been widely published in Theosophical journals, and she has lectured in Austria, Belgium, England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland.

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16. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. 9, p. 33.
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FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: (References to article are by page and paragraph.)

1. To which of the three Fundamental Propositions would “the gradual fall into materiality” correspond? (69.3)
2. “Error runs down an inclined plane, while Truth has to laboriously climb its way up hill.” Has the advent of computers, the Internet, and digital communications made this old proverb dated and irrelevant? (70.9)
3. Do you agree with the author’s statement that general public is not ready to embrace the truths of Theosophy? (71.2)
4. Contrast the views on liberation found in Vedanta and the *Voice of the Silence*.

EXCERPTS FROM *THE SECRET DOCTRINE* —

The Secret Doctrine is the common property of the countless millions of men born under various climates, in times with which history refuses to deal, and to which esoteric teachings assign dates incompatible with the theories of Geology and Anthropology. The birth and evolution of the Sacred Science of the Past are lost in the very night of Time, and that even which is historic—*i.e.*, that which is found scattered hither and thither throughout ancient classical literature—is, in almost every case, attributed by modern criticism to lack of observation in the ancient writers, or to superstition born out of the ignorance of antiquity. (2:794)

Marshaled by blind conservatism, conceit and prejudice, they [errors of the past] are constantly on the watch, ready to strangle every truth, which, awakening from its agelong sleep, happens to knock for admission. (1:299)

TRUTH, however distasteful to the generally blind majorities, has always had her champions, ready to die for her . . . (1:197)

ACTION ITEM

- Look up the allegory of the cave in Plato’s *Republic* to see what he has to say about the subject of human ignorance.

THE SECRET DOCTRINE— A GUIDE TO TRUTH

By Norman S. Hankin

Published in the 1969 Spring issue of *The American Theosophist*

The Eternal Parent, wrapped in her Ever-Invisible Robes, had slumbered once again for Seven Eternities.

Time was not, for it lay asleep in the Infinite Bosom of Duration.

Universal Mind was not, for there were no Ah-hi to contain it.

The Seven Ways to Bliss were not. The Great Causes of Misery were not, for there was no one to produce and get ensnared by them.

Darkness alone filled the Boundless All, for Father, Mother and Son were once more one, and the Son had not yet awakened for the new Wheel and his Pilgrimage thereon.

The Seven Sublime Lords and the Seven Truths had ceased to be, and the Universe, the Son of Necessity, was immersed in Paranishpanna, to be outbreathed by that which is, and yet is not. Naught was.¹

TRUTH—THEOSOPHY

In sonorous stanzas such as the above, we find outlined in *The Secret Doctrine* the cryptic formula which tells the story of that which is unmanifest becoming manifest, of that which is latent becoming patent, of Universal Thought becoming a universe indeed. These stanzas, however, are not just beautiful archaic phrases; they hold a depth of meaning which is profound. *The Secret Doctrine* by H. P. Blavatsky is, at first glance, a bewildering book, but one which to the eager student and aspirant reveals facets of truth whose value far outweighs the effort needed to discover them. In essence, the book is a set of commentaries on selected portions of the Stanzas of Dzyan, a document whose origin is veiled in mystery, but which, in fact, delineates in graphic terms a system of universal philosophical, mystical, and religious thought. It is an attempt to outline, but not confine, the fundamental truths of Theosophy. In doing so, it sets out broad principles, a universal framework of thought, into which the specialized branches of thought in religion, philosophy, science, and art are seen in their true perspective as aspects of the one universal truth.

What is this universal truth? It can be described as *Theos Sophia*, “Divine Wisdom,” that omniscient view of all existence as mirrored in the Divine Mind. It can be described in philosophical terms as the Absolute Reality; in religious terms as the Mind of God; and to each one of us, as individuals, it is the supreme mystery of life itself. In this expansive view of life and the universe, the whole of manifestation is seen as the constantly changing expression of One Life, all the manifold phenomena of the universe being the outward

forms of particular aspects of that One Life, inescapably related to each other by reason of their origin.

THEOSOPHY ENLIGHTENS THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

To realize fully the impact of theosophical thought on the world, we should endeavor to appreciate the climate of thought prevailing throughout the civilized world in 1888 when *The Secret Doctrine* was written. Nationalistic pride, including its negative aspect of disdain for less privileged nations, was at its strongest. Religious thought was rigid and narrow, and tolerance could not be tolerated. Science, struggling in its new-found freedom from religious domination, was taking an extremely materialistic view of all phenomena, waiting for the time—just around the corner—when scientific investigation would prove that life was just the end effect of permutations of matter and man only a rationalizing ape.

Into this arena of thought, H. P. Blavatsky threw the gauntlet of Theosophy; the storm it evoked in the philosophical, scientific, and religious circles of the day was perhaps the measure of its success in challenging the conventional wisdom of the late nineteenth century.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF *THE SECRET DOCTRINE*

The Secret Doctrine is woven around the Three Fundamental Propositions, which are given in the first volume and elaborated upon with a great wealth of detail throughout the remainder of the work. These are:

1. 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. It is beyond the range and reach of thought—in the words of the *Māndūkya Upanishad*, “unthinkable and unspeakable.”²
2. The Eternity of the Universe *in toto* as a boundless plane; periodically “the playground of numberless Universes incessantly manifesting and disappearing” . . . the absolute universality of that law of periodicity, of flux and reflux, ebb and flow, which physical science has observed and recorded in all departments of nature.³
3. The fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul, the latter being itself an aspect of the Unknown Root; and the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul—a spark of former—through the Cycle of Incarnation (or Necessity) in accordance with Cyclic and Karmic Law, during the whole term.⁴

TRUTH UNTHINKABLE

The first Proposition would seem to be a philosophical necessity, yet one which transcends our normal range of thought. We should remember, however, that “An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless and Immutable Principle” will include, of necessity, the

temporal and partial as well as the eternal and boundless. This is well expressed by Mme. Blavatsky when she speaks of the Maya (or illusion) of existence in this world.

Nothing is permanent except the one hidden absolute existence which contains in itself the noumena of all realities. The existences belonging to every plane of being up to the highest Dhyani-Chohans,⁵ are, in degree, of the nature of shadows cast by a magic lantern on a colorless screen; but all things are relatively real, for the cognizer is also a reflection, and the things cognized are therefore as real to him as himself. Whatever reality things possess must be looked for in them before or after they have passed like a flash through the material world; but we cannot cognize any such existence directly, so long as we have sense-instruments which bring only material existence into the field of our consciousness. Whatever plane our consciousness may be acting in, both we and the things belonging to that plane are, for the time being, our only realities . . . only when we shall have reached absolute Consciousness, and blended our own with it, shall we be free from the delusions produced by Maya.⁶

TRUTH UNIVERSAL

The second Proposition speaks of the Eternity of the Universe “in toto,” which seems to point again to that reality behind all phenomena which will be found “before or after they have passed like a flash through the material world.” From this reality there spring “numberless Universes incessantly manifesting and disappearing.” Here is a cosmic picture which bewildered and astounded the minds of the Victorian era. The idea of matter appearing spontaneously in space is a concept belonging to the twentieth century. The reasonable and logical corollary of a cosmic intelligence which initiates these movements is an idea which, while long held in religious traditions, has yet to penetrate into the thinking of men and women in the contemporary world.

But the second Proposition goes further and postulates that all such manifestation takes place under a universal cyclic law of ebb and flow, flux and reflux. This means, in effect, that everything that exists in our world—from the galaxies and planets to microscopic life, from the densest physical matter to the most subtle spiritual thought or aspiration—is subject to this law; a thought which is of great potential value to all of us in living our ordinary lives if we will follow up its full implications. All activity, all manifestation, is cyclic. It has its conception, birth, youth, maturity, old age, and death. Then through the mysterious negative half-cycle of the unmanifest, there appears again the urge to manifest.

TRUTH INDIVIDUAL

It is, however, in the third Proposition that Theosophy makes its greatest contribution to the upliftment of contemporary Western thought, for it restores to man his true status as an immortal spiritual being, intrinsically and mysteriously one with the divine source of all life and being. At the same time, it explains the enigma of these personalities of ours, which, at times, do not reflect the wisdom, strength, or beauty of our true spiritual nature.

This is the position in which most of us find ourselves here and now in our daily lives. Through birth, background, temperament, and education, we have built a personality with various traits. From the point of view of Theosophy, however, you—the real spiritual individuality—only *look through* this personality for the gathering of experience and wisdom, and, at the same time, give it the only reality or permanence it possesses. In other words, we can apply to ourselves the principle given in the commentary on the first Proposition: “Whatever reality things [or personalities] possess must be looked for in them before or after they have passed like a flash through the material world.”

The “pilgrimage” or “Cycle of Incarnation” for every soul, referred to in the third Proposition, is the repeated embodiment of the true spiritual individuality in successive personalities which this real self creates and then looks through. This repeated embodiment, or incarnation, is governed by an immutable law of cause and effect, action and reaction, at all levels of consciousness; and by experiencing the reactions to our own actions, we—the permanent actors in life’s drama—grow in wisdom, strength, and love. Gradually we learn that we ourselves have created our present circumstances and tendencies and that, day by day, we can create our own future by our actions.

TRUE HAPPINESS

In this brief delineation of the basic tenets of *The Secret Doctrine*, and thus of Theosophy, we have merely traced the skeleton of the rich body of truth. If we are to discover truth itself, we need to build into such a framework the flesh of living experience. Theosophy can be realized only as it is lived and applied, as well as studied. It demands our total commitment to the search for that ultimate reality which is mysteriously also our own deepest self.

In the light of Theosophy, man is seen in true perspective as an immortal, spiritual being, gaining wisdom and experience through the living of human life in many personalities. Each one of us is a spark of that One Life which irradiates and sustains all manifestation, and therefore our only true happiness consists in thought, feeling, and action which are consonant with the unity of all life. If we could but remain always conscious of that unity, if we could act from that deep center within ourselves where unity dwells, naturally and beautifully, some of the strains caused by our personal ambitions would disappear and true happiness would begin to shine through our everyday life. Understanding would become deeper, love firmer and wider. Beauty would be discovered in many unexpected places as the light within recognizes and discerns, with ever-deepening awareness, the light of truth and beauty eternal shining through the broken shapes of the temporal.

Eventually, we will all come by our own efforts to that state of spiritual awareness and unity with all life which will lift us from the human to the divine. Perhaps the wonder and mystery of this final achievement may be deeply sensed in the closing words of the Stanzas of Dzyan:

From the First-born the thread between the Silent Watcher and his Shadow becomes more strong and radiant with every change. The morning sunlight has changed into noonday glory. “This is thy present wheel,” said the Flame to the Spark. “Thou art myself, my image and my shadow. I have clothed myself in thee, and thou art my Vahan⁷ to the Day “Be With Us,” when thou shalt re-become myself and others, thyself and me.” Then the builders, having donned their first clothing, descend on radiant earth and reign over men—who are themselves . . .⁸

Norman S. Hankin (1917-98) was a second-generation Theosophist who lived most of his life in Australia. During World War II he served as an officer in the Australian Imperial Force. After joining the Theosophical Society in 1944, he became a stalwart member of the Sydney Lodge, also serving as National Treasurer of the Australian Section, and Chairman of the Theosophical Foundation. During his years of service to the Society, Mr. Hankin lectured internationally and wrote numerous articles which were published in Theosophical journals around the world. His three great loves in life were his family, music, and Theosophy.

References

1. Blavatsky, H. P., *The Secret Doctrine*, TPH, Adyar, 1979, vol. 1, p. 27.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
5. Literally, “Lords of Light.” Divine Intelligences charged with the supervision of the Kosmos.
6. Blavatsky, pp. 39-40.
7. Vahana (Sanskrit): a vehicle; the carrier of something immaterial and formless.
8. Blavatsky, p. 34.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: (References to article are by page and paragraph.)

1. What is your reaction to the stanzas quoted at the beginning of the article? (75.1)
2. The origin of the Stanzas of Dzyan is shrouded in mystery. Does not knowing their exact source affect your ability to appreciate them? (75.1)
3. Try to illustrate the difference between universal truths and relative truths.
4. Is a relative truth less important than a universal truth?
5. The way a person lives his daily life has little to do with his ability to gain a mastery of certain branches of knowledge such as mathematics, economics, or biology. Why, then, does the author state that “Theosophy can be realized only as it is lived and

applied . . .” Can we not approach Theosophy as we would any other branch of knowledge? (78.3)

6. How does an awareness of the unity of life enable us to discover beauty in “many unexpected places”? (78.4)

EXCERPTS FROM *THE SECRET DOCTRINE* —

Time is only an illusion produced by the succession of our states of consciousness as we travel through eternal duration, and it does not exist where no consciousness exists in which the illusion can be produced, but “lies asleep.” The present is only a mathematical line which divides that part of eternal duration which we call the future, from that part which we call the past. Nothing on earth has real duration, for nothing remains without change—or the same—for the billionth part of a second; and the sensation we have of the actuality of the division of “time” known as the present, comes from the blurring of that momentary glimpse, or succession of glimpses, of things that our senses give us, as those things pass from the region of ideals which we call the future, to the region of memories that we name the past. (1:37)

How can a Western scholar accept on hearsay that which he knows nothing about? Indeed, that which is given in these volumes is selected from *oral*, as much as from written teachings. This first installment of the esoteric doctrines is based upon Stanzas, which are the records of a people unknown to ethnology; it is claimed that they are written in a tongue absent from the nomenclature of languages and dialects with which philology is acquainted; they are said to emanate from a source (Occultism) repudiated by science; and, finally, they are offered through an agency, incessantly discredited before the world by all those who hate unwelcome truths, or have some special hobby of their own to defend. Therefore, the rejection of these teachings may be expected, and must be accepted beforehand. No one styling himself a “scholar,” in whatever department of exact science, will be permitted to regard these teachings seriously. They will be derided and rejected *a priori* in this century; but only in this one. For in the twentieth century of our era scholars will begin to recognize that the *Secret Doctrine* has neither been invented nor exaggerated, but, on the contrary, simply outlined; and finally, that its teachings antedate the *Vedas*. —Introductory [vol. 1, p. xxxvii]

THE SECRET DOCTRINE AS A CONTRIBUTION TO WORLD THOUGHT

By Sri Madhava Ashish

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The world's many religious teachings are human attempts to express mankind's half-defined ideas about itself and the world we live in. As we become richer in our wealth of concepts and more knowledgeable about our environment, we find it necessary from time to time to reformulate our religious ideas. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky's contribution to world thought was such a reformulation. It was no new truth that she propounded; she claimed, in fact, that she was only disclosing the secrets of the ancients. And though this was in some measure true, she spoke from the position of a woman of her time, well-versed in the science of her day. She produced a reformulation of religious ideas which began to combine the transcendental wisdom of the East with the scientific knowledge of the West.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines Theosophy as: "Any system of speculation which bases the knowledge of nature upon that of the divine nature." We may add that knowledge of the divine nature is obtained through knowledge of its manifest qualities in nature. Although HPB rightly tilted at the materialism of nineteenth-century science, and though some of her own statements seem to have been extravagantly wrong, she was not so much denying the natural facts discovered by scientists as she was the constructions they built upon those facts. At a time when faith in religious myth and superstition was badly shaken by scientific discoveries, she reintroduced the thinking world to the idea of a non-theistic spiritual path—the path of human evolutionary aspiration. Through the *Cosmogogenesis of The Secret Doctrine* she began an attempt to heal the dichotomy between the religio-spiritual and the scientifico-material views of life. Neither did "God" make the world, nor was it made by the random concatenation of energetic particles. And emphatically the world was not limited to the phenomena susceptible to analysis by the scientific method. What the West had regarded as a personal God was the power which sought, as Jacob Boehme¹ said, to find, feel, and behold itself. And to discover that power we have to search with as much realism and urgency in this field of inquiry as does the scientist within the limits of his field.

Although, as the Emerald Tablet² of Hermes Trismegistus says, our path is analytically to "Separate the earth from the fire, the subtle from the gross, gently and with skill," our view of being must synthetically encompass all things which were "produced from One by the mediation of One." To find the All from which all things come, we must search within the totality of Being with the totality of our being. If in the study of the divine being we ignore the study of its manifest nature, we are rejecting the means by which the divine consciousness itself becomes aware of its own inherent qualities. It is the purpose of a cosmogony to lead us to a perception of the unmanifest power which underlies the world of appearances.

This is the purpose of the Stanzas of Dzyan, and this is the purpose of HPB's *The Secret Doctrine*. Unless we understand the harmonious interrelationships of all things, unless we perceive the divine purpose which gives direction and significance to all events, then we fall into the chaos of meaninglessness.

Many people drew water from HPB's spring and channeled it into their particular religious schools, but she herself was concerned neither with the founding of a new school nor with the resuscitation of old ones. She taught the timeless truth of man's essential identity with the divine power which, in making manifest its own hidden qualities, discovers itself to itself through the human vehicle of its own awareness. She spoke with the authority of those who stood behind her, the Adepts or Masters of the Secret Wisdom who themselves embody the truth she taught. And she expounded their path of compassion through which those humans who complete the evolutionary cycle and attain to the goal of self-knowledge, toward which the whole manifest process is directed, remain in their state of utter perfection so that the light of their being may shine out as a beacon of love to others. Love is the unmanifest made manifest; suffering is its privation. We cannot have the one without the other. Those who reject suffering also reject the demands of love, and for them there is the direct path of self-annihilation in return to the absolute Source of all things.

As we have said, the basic tenets of HPB's Theosophy were not new. For many centuries the East had known that the Self of man and the Self of the universe are one. But in application, this knowledge was restricted to a relatively select number of people, for the reason that it is a truth that can be grasped only by those whose understanding ranks high on the scale of human evolution. In the ancient world, the select few raised their level of intelligence and culture at the expense of the many, gaining the physical leisure they needed for active thought by causing others to labor for them. This inevitably led to corruption, for, though it was not true of men of actual spiritual attainment, wherever the inner truth was formulated as a teaching, the holders of the teaching denied by their privileges the very unity which by virtue of their privileged position they were able to perceive. The most orthodox of Brahmans would devoutly recite Sanskrit verses in praise of the one divinity manifest in many forms, yet would simultaneously deny other castes access to his knowledge, just as, in another setting, the Roman Catholic priesthood denied the laity access to the secrets of the Church. Nevertheless, it can be maintained that such exclusiveness was justified in that era by the real difficulty of holding to intellectual perceptions against the constant tendency to revert to the level of nonintellectual, tribal man.

As with an individual, the body of humanity simultaneously grows or evolves in all its parts. But, again as with an individual, its parts serve different functions. While the Eastern limb of humanity remained relatively static, holding to its transcendental perceptions, the Western limb set off to adventure in the fields of mundane knowledge. The West's consequent assertion of material values led to a greater separation of the human conscious ego

integration from the underlying unit of the Self than occurred in the East. It is this increased separation which gives rise to the West's heightened psychic tension with its consequent expression as available psychic energy.

From the Western viewpoint, the East remains "unconscious" and "primitive," even though it represents the repository of the Secret Wisdom. This is why the Western dreamer, and the novelist who dreams for collective humanity, often represent the journey into Self by a recession into primitive or prehistoric surroundings. This is the pattern which led HPB in *The Secret Doctrine* to lay undue stress on the significance of prehistoric races. The dawn that seems to hang permanently over the lands of the rising sun brightens to noon-day glory in the West, so that the brightly wide-awake, outward looking consciousness of the Western man is, as it were, separated from his "Eastern," spiritually perceptive dawn state. Now, having spent his energy and found the product bitter, the Westerner looks toward the East, which outwardly represents the dawn state he has lost in himself, while the Easterner begins to summon to the service of his hitherto stagnant life the vitality and persistence that has become second nature to the West. As a generalization, one can say that the Westerner typically has difficulty in understanding what the spiritual path is about, but if he once catches onto the idea, he can bring great energy and persistence to its achievement. Knowledge of what has to be done is the Easterner's birthright, but he seldom wants to do anything about it. Theoretical or philosophical knowledge and practical application are two very different things. Knowledge and energy have to be joined; which means, in effect, that every individual person has to unite East and West in himself if mankind is to achieve an integral perception of the actual truth, uncolored by racial or sectarian bias.

Whatever our cultural background, we are faced by the same problem: how to bring a realistic attitude to bear on religious inquiry. Either we do not know what it is all about, or, knowing it, we do not want it. We perform the traditional actions of making spiritual effort, kneeling or sitting cross-legged in meditation, singing devotional hymns, and arguing philosophical problems, but they are ritual automatisms, empty of the fire of true aspiration. The posture is a gymnastic achievement, the meditation is a set exercise instead of being an urgent inquiry, the devotional hymns loaded with sentimentality instead of being the soul's ecstatic agony, and the arguments are set pieces learned by rote.

In this context it may be understood that HPB's cosmogonic approach to the subject was consonant with her entirely transectarian attitude. The religionist (and the scientist) works within the confines of his creed. The cosmogonist, confronted by the self-evident fact of evolution, perceives the wonder of the divine nature and inquires into its factual source, its purpose, and its goal. Though his system of reference includes much that the scientist would call unproven or even subjective, he is concerned with what to him is rational fact. He is concerned not with "God" but with the power that includes both the world and the awareness by which the world is perceived. The power that raised man from the dust is, in

the last analysis, the same as the power that looks through the eyes, hears through the ears, and touches with the hands. Man is at one with the universe; and that is the same as saying that man is at one with God. Man is God, or God is man; it makes little difference which way one looks at it. Nor is it a blank, impersonal power, for what is blank and impersonal could not give birth to the full personality of man.

But to say that the divine power encompasses personality does not mean that there is a personal God, for the universally diffused awareness does not discriminate between the bliss of one individual and the suffering of another. The undeniable fact of personal grace is to be attributed to the intervention of those Perfected Men at one with divinity whom HPB called the Masters. There can be no two ways about it: the thing we have wrapped up in symbols and called God, Spirit, Atman, Self, or what you will, is the self-nature of both man and the universe. Qualities of being, which were so deeply buried as hardly to be called human potentialities, were projected out onto the heavens in the form of the God image. This fact finds expression in Hindu ritual worship, where the deity meditated upon in the heart, is breathed out into an image, there to be worshipped, and afterwards breathed in again. Like the Divine Being itself, to know what lies hidden in the darkness of the heart we must first bring it out into the daylight world of form.

When, with the all too slow evolution of man, these potentialities of the Self become realizable, their projection onto the God image is necessarily withdrawn and God seems to die. What was projected outside now has to be found as integral parts of the unity that is man. What previously flowed as external streams of traditional religion must now well up in man's heart as the pure springs of the Spirit. God does not die, but lives where he always was, in identity with the Self of man.

Like everything else, the individual Self must evolve and grow, passing from unrealized potential to a clear focus in the trans-individual light. But it is the Self of man—not an Eastern or Western Self. Nor is the distinction between an Eastern and Western psyche any more than that between a peasant and a citizen anywhere in the world. These racial distinctions are not fundamental differences in human types, but are, rather, stages along man's evolutionary path which are reached at different times by different peoples. But neither East nor West is more or less advanced because one has taken a stride with the left leg while another has taken a stride with the right.

This is a point we have to get clear in our minds if the Westerner is to appreciate the full value of HPB's work and not tend to dismiss it as exotic Orientalism. One has heard of many Westerners blaming their contact with "oriental mysticism" for landing them in psychological trouble of one sort or another, an attitude which is no more intelligent than that of some psychologists in India who trace patients' troubles to their practice of yogic exercises, instead of seeing that the sort of individual who is liable to neurosis often seeks relief from their tensions through so-called yoga. Any traveler of the spiritual path ought to know that his road will lead him away from the well-trodden ways of gregarious company

and into the deep and unfrequented jungles of the mind. It makes not the slightest difference where one's teaching comes from; one cannot blame the teaching for the beasts that lurk in one's private jungle. By whatever path one goes, sooner or later tensions are going to arise. How one deals with them, and how much tension the individual can stand, are matters to be decided between teacher and pupil.

This vexed question of a supposed inherent difference between the Eastern and the Western psyche was propounded by C. G. Jung,³ the famous psychotherapist, whose apparent failure to come to terms with his own psychic "East" accounts for his theories on the subject, and for much of his hesitation on the brink of the spiritual leap. East and West are within each of us. The typically active Westerner needs to find the appreciation of those timeless spiritual values of the East in whose presence the West's technological achievements are as so much dust, while the Easterner needs some of the West's energy. It has to be added, however, that this is a different question from the case of a person who attempts to settle in a foreign environment, such as a Zen monastery or an Indian ashram. The latter person can be courting trouble of a sort that has nothing to do with oriental mysticism but much to do with the ordinary human adjustments to food, climate, language, racial sympathies, and customs. He must either be content to remain a foreigner, sticking out from his environment like a sore thumb, or he must submit himself to a reconditioning of his basic habits, equivalent to an intense brain-washing. Resistance to such change, and therefore the amount of psychic tension involved, varies with individuals. Nevertheless it should be emphasized that the only adequate basis for such adaptation is the personal and reciprocal affection between teacher and pupil. If this is absent, much of the effort is simply wasted.

It is unfortunate that Jung took the attitude he did toward the East and the spiritual path in general. The entry to the path opens inward, and for practical purposes can be equated with the psychological inquiry into the causes of behavior, emotion, and thought. All real spiritual teachers have been wise in the science of the soul—a science whose modern name is psychology, for the Greek word for soul is Psyche. But Jung, who seems to have come nearer to an affirmation of the spirit than any of the other modern psychologists, sows his doubts in the minds of his readers as he leads them to the point beyond which he fears to go, so that, as he turns away, they turn away with him. The closer to truth a man goes, the more insidious his doubts become.

Unless we are ready to enter the gateway into the subconscious parts of our natures, we never really learn anything about ourselves. Our nature's many aspects cause us to throw many shadows whose basis within ourselves we so much fear to see that we prefer to think them the inferior qualities of our friends. Entry marks the difference between the person who has really begun to work on himself and the one who has vaguely spiritual ideas, has studied philosophy, or performs a few religious observances. We have to unlearn the imposed patterns of childhood's conditioning and, like a deformed plant, be cut back to our

roots and grow again—straight. We have to learn a new language, the language of Darkest Africa, that dark continent of all those hidden parts of ourselves of which we are not normally aware. It is the language of feeling: signs, symbols, the primitive sign language of our racial childhood, which we left behind us in the magical East when we set out to discover the material world. Indeed, it is primal rather than primitive, the pictographic ideograms from which language derives, basic to man as man. He who can read this language aright has the key to many mysteries. It is the gateway to the East, the return path to psychic wholeness, the path which is truly open only to the strong, for, as Kipling said:

But there is neither East nor West,
border, nor breed, nor birth,
When two strong men stand face to face,
though they come from the ends of earth!⁴

Mankind is one. If we cannot see this, if we are so identified with the material accidents of our racial environment that we cannot recognize the common bond of humanity which bridges all differences of culture, language, symbolic vocabulary, and psychic attitude, then we should at least have the humility to admit our inferiority on the scale of human evolution.

To many of us, and in particular to the younger generations who know nothing of HPB's work, some of the main ideas disseminated by Theosophy are now so much of a commonplace that we may fail to appreciate our debt to the person who made them available in popular form, just as few of us appreciate our debt to Martin Luther for our freedom to write of these things, unhindered by fear of the Catholic Inquisition. People who are unwittingly indebted to HPB for the mystical road to the East, which she opened to them, ignorantly side with the detractors of her controversial personality. In fact, one finds it hard to imagine what it was like before such ideas were commonly available, and the only way offered was through the seemingly empty and meaningless posturings of orthodox religion.

Perhaps every generation feels that it stands at a vitally significant turning point in human evolution. In our present age, the fate of mankind seems to turn less on good or bad works than on how many of us can get a direct grasp of those basic values of being, which makes it matter whether people do or don't do anything at all. It's the loss of such values, with the consequent sense of life's meaninglessness, which has led to the present position in which society seems bent on plunging into undirected chaos. When, however, the significance of life seems to disappear, it is not really lost; the old formulation of life's meaning has become inadequate, the light has gone out of the form, and an attempt must be made to reformulate the light of meaning in a somewhat more meaningful manner.

The God image, with its associated creeds and dogmas, has been an effective means of guiding human evolution for several centuries. Under the influence of its projected

potency, the general level of mankind has been raised from tribal law to the democratic concept; individuals are supposed to have developed a sufficiently rational control of their baser instincts to enable them to achieve some sort of personal fulfillment, while contributing to the common good. In other words, the individual has developed a conscience which tempers his egotistic desire. But this conscience, when examined, turns out not to derive from direct perception of the eternal verities but from reflexes conditioned by childhood's indoctrination. When a society learns to challenge the validity of its conscience, its ethic tends to collapse into amorality. At such a moment, mankind's continuing health depends on the appearance of a reformulation of the eternal truth in such a form as can be readily understood by the man or woman of average intelligence. And that, we repeat, is what we feel to have been the significance of HPB's contribution to world thought.

Sri Madhava Ashish (1920-1997) was born in Edinburgh, Scotland as Alexander Phipps. He attended the College of Aeronautical Engineering in Chelsea and during World War II served in the armed forces while stationed in India. After the war, he met Sri Krishna Prem and soon took up residence at Prem's ashram in Mirtola, located at the foothills of the Himalayas. With the exception of a single trip to England in 1991, he never left India. Sri Madhava Ashish is the co-author of *Man, the Measure of All Things*, and the author of *Man, Son of Man*.

References

1. Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), a German Christian mystic.
2. The Emerald Tablet is said to be the foundation of Western Alchemical thought as we know it today.
3. Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961).
4. Kipling, "The Ballad of East and West."

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: (References to article are by page and paragraph.)

1. Do you agree with Ashish that the world's religious teachings are just imperfect human expressions regarding humanity and the world it lives in? (81.1)
2. If we are to understand the nature of the divine, why, according to Ashish, is it necessary to include the natural world within the scope of our study? (81.2)
3. Can we experience true love without opening ourselves up to the possibility of suffering? (82.1)
4. In ancient times, esoteric knowledge was limited to a select few. What criticism does Ashish make regarding those who held this knowledge? What argument does he offer in their defense? (82.2)

5. As symbols, what do East and West represent to the spiritual aspirant? (83.1)
6. What can those living in the West learn from the East, and vice versa?
7. According to Ashish, what is the source of personal grace? (84.1)
8. Does Ashish share Jung's view that the Eastern and Western psyche are fundamentally different? (85.1)
9. "The closer to truth a man goes, the more insidious his doubts become." How do you explain this somewhat paradoxical statement? (85.2)
10. In your opinion, to what extent has a sense of life's meaninglessness contributed to the world's problems? (86.3)

EXCERPTS FROM *THE SECRET DOCTRINE* —

Woe to those who live without suffering. Stagnation and death is the future of all that vegetates without a change. And how can there be any change for the better without proportionate suffering during the preceding stage? Is it not those only who have learnt the deceptive value of earthly hopes and the illusive allurements of external nature who are destined to solve the great problems of life, pain, and death? (2:475)

They are Entities of the higher worlds in the hierarchy of Being, so immeasurably high that, to us, they must appear as Gods, and collectively—GOD. But so we, mortal men, must appear to the ant, which reasons on the scale of its special capacities. The ant may also, for all we know, see the avenging finger of a personal God in the hand of the urchin who, in one moment, under the impulse of mischief, destroys its anthill, the labor of many weeks—long years in the chronology of insects. The ant, feeling it acutely, and attributing the undeserved calamity to a combination of Providence and sin, may also, like man, see in it the result of the sin of its first parent. Who knows and who can affirm or deny? The refusal to admit in the whole Solar system of any other reasonable and intellectual beings on the human plane, than ourselves, is the greatest conceit of our age. All that science has a right to affirm, is that there are no invisible Intelligences living under the same conditions as we do. It cannot deny point-blank the possibility of there being worlds within worlds, under totally different conditions to those that constitute the nature of our world; nor can it deny that there may be a certain limited communication between some of those worlds and our own. (1:133)