

THE SECRET DOCTRINE AS A CONTRIBUTION TO WORLD THOUGHT

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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 time. 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 Boehme 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 Tablet 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 Perfected Men or Masters of the Secret Wisdom who themselves embody the truth she taught. And she expounded their path of compassion through which those men 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 that the light of their being may shine out as a beacon of love to other men. 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 which can be grasped only by those whose understanding ranks high in 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 the collectivity of men, 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 which 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 man 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 the 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 man who is liable to neurosis often seeks relief from his 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 men 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, 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 so the amount of psychic tension involved, varies with individuals. Nevertheless it should be stressed that the only adequate basis for such adaptation is personal and reciprocal affection between teacher and pupil. If this is absent, much of the effort is so much waste.

It is unfortunate that C. G. Jung took the attitude he did toward the Orient 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 man 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!

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 in 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 on those basic values of being which make it matter whether people do or do not do anything at all. It is the loss of such values, with the consequent sense of life's meaninglessness that 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 in which each individual is supposed to have developed a sufficiently rational control of his baser instincts to enable him to achieve some sort of personal fulfillment while contributing to the common good. In other terms: the individual has developed a conscience which tempers his egotistic desire. But his 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 average intelligent man. And that, we repeat, is what we feel to have been the significance of HPB's contribution to world thought.