

What is Theosophy?

A General View for Inquirers

By Charles J. Ryan

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Section 1

[What is Theosophy?](#)

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What Is Theosophy?

Examine yourselves; realize that there is divinity within you, call it by what name you please. . . .
Examine your own inner movements of consciousness, and you will know that these things of glory are in you. They are the working in you of your inner god, your spiritual inner sun.

This is the message of the great Sages and Seers of all the ages. . . .

. . . that living fire of consciousness within your breast which tells you of your oneness with all that is, and of your kinship with everything that is; for verily you are akin to the gods who are the rulers and counselors and governors of the Universe. — G. de Purucker, *Questions We All Ask*

WHAT, indeed, is theosophy? This question, now being asked with increasing earnestness, cannot be answered in one sentence, but the leaders of the Theosophical Movement have given a few pithy expressions of its various aspects which form a fitting introduction. Helena P. Blavatsky, the Founder of the Theosophical Society, said:

Theosophy is, then, the archaic *Wisdom-Religion*, the esoteric doctrine once known in every ancient country having claims to civilization. — *The Theosophist*, October 1879
Theosophy is the quintessence of duty. — *The Key to Theosophy*

William Q. Judge begins his *Ocean of Theosophy* with this:

Theosophy is that ocean of knowledge which spreads from shore to shore of the evolution of sentient beings; unfathomable in its deepest parts, it gives the greatest minds their fullest scope, yet, shallow enough at its shores, it will not overwhelm the understanding of a child. . . .
Embracing both the scientific and the religious, Theosophy is a scientific religion and a religious science.

According to Katherine Tingley:

Theosophy is the inner life in every religion. It is no new religion, but is as old as truth itself. . . .

Theosophy will bring something to you that can never pass away: the consciousness of your divine, your inner self; a conviction of your inherent power to conserve your energy along the highest spiritual lines. For man cannot find his true place in the great scheme of human life until he has ennobled and enriched his nature with the consciousness of his divinity. . . .

Think of theosophy not so much as a body of philosophic or other teaching, but as the highest law of conduct, which is the enacted expression of divine love or compassion. — *Theosophy: The Path of the Mystic*, Chapter 1

G. de Purucker, the fourth leader of the Theosophical Society, defines the theosophical philosophy in these words:

The Theosophical philosophy is not something which has been invented by anybody at any time: it is the formulation of the truths of Nature — not of outer Nature alone, which is but the effectual mirroring of hid causes; but more particularly of the vast causal realms behind the outer Nature which our senses know — behind the outer veil of Reality; for these inner and causal realms are the inner Heart of Things. These truths were originally formulated in systematic manner in far past time by Great Seers. This formulation of natural truth has come down to our own times checked and tested in every age by new generations of these Great Seers. This formulation today is called Theosophy. — *The Theosophical Path*, Jan. 1930, pp. 3-4

Theosophy is not a religion in the ordinary sense; and the Theosophical Society is not a Church in any sense. H. P. Blavatsky was inflexibly opposed to the idea that it should degenerate into a sect and set up hard-and-fast dogmas or traffic with sectarian methods.

The object of its founders was to liberate man from bondage by presenting a philosophy of life that would show him how to find the truth within himself. The literature presented by the Theosophical Society, though a statement in modern form of the ancient wisdom, is not offered as a creed, but is intended to provoke thought and study. It gives an explanation of the problems of life that every person can verify for himself, if he so will. Belief in, and the wish to promote, the brotherhood of mankind are the only prerequisites for good standing in the Theosophical Society.

Theosophy touches life at all points and illuminates every problem, but, naturally, different people find certain aspects more attractive than others — especially at the beginning. To the most intuitive, who immediately perceive the practical importance of its teachings for the happiness and welfare of humanity, this is the greatest incentive to its study; others appreciate its profound speculative features; some are attracted by its revelation of the inner meaning and basic unity of the great world religions; and there are many who prefer the scientific aspect, which includes the rational explanation of occult phenomena. To meet these conditions we must consider as many aspects of our subject as space permits.

Theosophy a Unity of Religion, Science, and Philosophy

From the foregoing citations the reader will rightly conclude that theosophy is very inclusive. Dr. de Purucker says:

Now, the operations of the human consciousness are threefold, if you analyze them carefully; and these threefold operations men have designated by the words religion, philosophy, and science. . . .

They are not fundamentally different, but are like the three sides of a triangle, or like three views or ways of looking at truth, and their unified vision proclaims the recondite facts of Being. — *Man in Evolution*, Chapter 1

The mistake of the modern age is to separate the field of knowledge into divisions. We notice this particularly in science, wherein specialization is becoming an embarrassment. In demonstrating that religion, philosophy, and science are and must be a unity, theosophy does not strain any point to combine factors that are really not harmonious; it simply presents well-known facts from a new aspect.

Another artificial and fatal division that vanishes in the light of theosophy is that between the speculations of philosophy and the practical conduct of life. A fundamental principle in theosophy, one that cannot be too strongly emphasized, is that its teachings cannot be properly understood without a sincere effort to make them a power in our everyday lives; theosophy is not for Sundays alone. As H. P. Blavatsky said, "Theosophist is who Theosophy does," and as Dr. de Purucker says, "Love is the cement of the universe," without which it would fall to pieces (in other words, "God is Love"). So how can we expect to understand the laws of nature if we outrage them by our selfish thoughts and acts? Belief and conduct cannot be separated in the true.

Universal Laws in Nature

The beginner in theosophy has a right to know the foundations of the theosophical structure, although only the briefest outline can be given here.

There is one infinite Life, without beginning or end; no such thing as dead matter exists in nature. Every atom is a spark of the one Life. The divine unity behind all manifestation, commonly called spirit and matter, which some call God, others That (Sanskrit *sat* or *tat*), is so infinitely beyond comprehension that we can only stand in mute awe and refuse to insult its majesty by attempting to describe it. The most reverent conception for us is that which comes from Oriental teachings: absolute compassion. Early mystical Christianity says:

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. — John 1:18

The initiate Paul repeats:

Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see . . . — 1 Timothy 6:16
God is Love. — 1 John 4:16

Those statements are purely theosophical, and they are not atheistic. From the Unknowable its manifestation in the dualities of spirit and matter descends in cycles of *manvantara* (activity) and *pralaya* (repose), ranging from cosmic, solar, and world periods to such familiar alternations as sleeping and waking. The evolution of the human soul by physical incarnation, alternating with rest in spiritual conditions, has its place in this universal law of cycles.

In the East this process is called the Great Breath. During the outbreathing the gods awake: hierarchies of innumerable degrees of spiritual and other beings become active. With the inbreathing the process is reversed: the manifested universe returns to the Father, enriched by experience.

Man on earth is a life-atom of the Divine, immersed in matter, a pilgrim seeking his way back to the source. At a certain stage of experience an inner awakening takes place, and it is then possible for him to step knowingly upon what is called the path. As love is the law of life, the only way to find the path to the god within is by obeying the law of compassion, of brotherhood. So we find every true spiritual teacher throughout the ages bringing the same message, which Dr. de Purucker has phrased in the following way:

Love is the cement of the universe. Learn to forgive. Learn to love. Each one of you is an incarnate god. Be it!

The aim of the Theosophical Society is to spread this teaching of universal brotherhood by revealing the facts on which it rests, and thus showing it to be the inevitable way to peace and happiness. H. P. Blavatsky, the one who was chosen to establish the modern Theosophical Movement, gives the key to the whole situation in a few words:

Our duty is to keep alive in man his spiritual intuitions.

There exist on earth, though unknown to the world at large, a few rare souls, the efflorescence of the age, who have purified themselves from all traces of personal selfishness and have become living incarnations of love and wisdom. Such are the Masters of wisdom, compassion, and peace who established the Theosophical Movement and who uphold and protect it today. These Masters of life have *realized* the truth of the most fundamental teaching of the wisdom-religion, theosophy, the *oneness of man with the universe*. They have found the divinity within, the inner god. They know the meaning of what the Upanishads say in so many ways: "THAT *thou art*."

The Theosophical Society

The Theosophy Society was founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, a Russian of high social rank. Her purpose was to restore theosophy to the West and thereby to build a firm foundation for the brotherhood of mankind. In her day Western civilization was in real danger from the increase of materialism, partly arising from the wonderful discoveries of physical science which seemed to discredit all spiritual interpretations of life; and H. P. Blavatsky was sent by the great Lodge of Guardians to counteract this by spreading theosophy. Not only science, but popular religion was materialistic: on the one hand blind force, and on the other rigid dogmatic formalism. A short time before the foundation of the Theosophical Society, Lord Lytton wrote:

Look where we will around us in every direction the sources of pure spiritual life appear to be altogether stagnant, or else trickling feebly in shrunken and turbid streams. . . . wherever the grandest issues of Humanity are at stake, man's spiritual attitude towards them is one either of

hopeless fatigue or fierce anarchical impatience. And this is the more deplorable because it is accompanied by a feverish materialistic activity. Yes, this age of ours is materialistic; and perhaps the saddest and dreariest thing in the ever-increasing materialism of the age is the ghostly squeaking and gibbering of helpless lamentation made over it by the theologians, who croak about their old dry wells wherein no spiritual life is left. Meanwhile society seems to be everywhere organizing animalism. — *Fort-nightly Review*, 1871

H. P. Blavatsky was specialty fitted for her mission by brilliant intelligence, dauntless courage, and overmastering desire to lift some of the burden of sorrow from the world. Her qualifications included trained occult faculties, which enabled her to demonstrate the theosophical teaching that man has far greater powers than he suspects locked up in his inner nature. After many wanderings in both hemispheres, she met certain members of the Tibetan Lodge of Initiates who prepared her for her coming work. She well knew that it involved the sacrifice of all that most people hold dear, and that the bitter hostility of the forces of prejudice and reaction would be aroused, yet she did not hesitate. However, in spite of having to endure both the crudest and most refined forms of persecution, and of being constantly misunderstood and misrepresented, she succeeded in spreading theosophy far and wide and in creating a large and active Society of earnest students and workers. Her teachings have already powerfully affected modern thought, and in the twentieth century, science, philosophy, and religion have been moving towards theosophy with rapidly increasing speed. In fact clergymen are preaching it from the pulpit, sometimes even using the name theosophy.

H. P. Blavatsky always repudiated the claim of having invented theosophy. Again and again she gave the credit for her teachings to her superiors, the guardians of the sacred knowledge. Her duty was to present it in a form acceptable to the West. As her work was chiefly intended to give Western civilization a new spiritual impulse, she was directed to begin in America, to which country she was sent by her teachers, the Masters of wisdom, in 1873.

On November 17, 1875, the Theosophical Society was established by her with the assistance of Col. H. S. Olcott, W. Q. Judge, and others, at New York. The remainder of her life was spent in spreading theosophy by personal teaching, writing books, editing magazines, and establishing Lodges in many countries. She died in London in 1891. In the sixteen years of her public activity the Society gained thousands of members, national and local centers were organized throughout the world, and a large literature was produced.

In 1888 Madame Blavatsky brought out her greatest work, *The Secret Doctrine*, which has had such a powerful effect on modern thought, and founded the Eastern or Esoteric School for the instruction of the more devoted students and as the energizing heart of the Movement.

After her death in 1891, William Q. Judge, her trusted American representative, who had been personally trained by her, was called on to keep the Movement true to the lines she had laid down; and when he passed away in 1896, Katherine Tingley took his place. She reorganized the Constitution of the Society and in 1900 established the administrative center at Point Loma, California.

Upon her death in 1929, G. de Purucker, who had occupied responsible positions at Point Loma for nearly thirty years, became Leader of the Theosophical Society. Dr. de Purucker expanded the scope of Theosophical University, making it a valuable adjunct to the work of the Society. By lectures, classes, and through his numerous writings such as *Fundamentals of the Esoteric Philosophy*, he clarified and made intelligible to the lay mind the profound philosophy given by H. P. Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine*. Shortly before his death in 1942 he removed the International Headquarters of the Society to Covina, California.

Under Arthur L. Conger the original line of teaching and training in the Society continued, with particular emphasis upon making the theosophical literature widely known, so that the beneficent teachings of the theosophical philosophy may be applied directly to human problems. He moved the International Headquarters to its present location near Pasadena, California, where it has continued under James A. Long and the present Leader, Grace F. Knoche.

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Universal Brotherhood and the Divinity of Man

As the main objects of the Theosophical Movement are the spreading of knowledge of the theosophical teachings, we must consider them first.

Theosophy does not teach that brotherhood depends upon external conditions — social, political or even intellectual. Its root lies in the order of nature, in the organic unity of the human race, physically and, above all, spiritually. Universal brotherhood is not something to be constructed; mankind is really a great family, and it is only our blindness that prevents us from recognizing this and acting accordingly. Mankind is an organism; men are its constituent cells, and what injures one hurts all. Theosophy shows that the recognition of this in the life of each individual — *with all that it implies* — is the only basis on which a true civilization can be built.

The brotherhood of mankind, therefore, is not a sentimental theory, framed to ameliorate stern realities; it is a fact in nature, and nature will ultimately compel us to accept it, even if it takes ages of suffering to bring it about. Theosophy calls to all people of goodwill to discover for themselves that the fundamental law of the universe is love and harmony, and that he who breaks it is swimming against the stream.

Our inner self knows this, and tries to enlighten our outer personality that we mistakenly think is our real self. We can hasten our evolution by opening our hearts; our destiny is in our own hands, and we can learn how to make it a conscious working with the divine intelligence in the universe.

Intimately connected with the doctrine of human brotherhood is that of the divinity of man. This, also, is no vague or pious sentiment, but a very real thing, taught by the greatest spiritual minds throughout the ages — those with the penetrating intuition that *knows*. Reason also confirms it, as we shall see in considering the theosophical teaching of the complexity of the human constitution.

While science is inclined to admit the physical unity and common origin of all human beings, the belief that we are merely more intelligent animals, perishing after one life on earth, still obsesses the scientific mentality, especially that of the psychologist. How can a high ideal of brotherhood be built on such a basis! No doubt many *theoretical* materialists feel an impelling urge to sacrifice themselves for others, and their noble acts are a living proof of the influence of the higher spiritual self, however they may deny it.

Denial of the inner god is not confined to professed materialists; certain brands of Western theology still teach that man is inherently vile: "born in sin." But Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21), and Paul proclaimed the "tidings of great joy": "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelt in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). If the Spirit dwelleth in every one, brotherhood must be the fact that theosophy declares it to be, and separateness the great heresy.

The inner divinity is not a thing that can be "saved" or artificially fabricated; it must be realized, made a living power. "When the lamp is cleaned and the wick trimmed, then only can the light shine." We have to do this ourselves.

A true theosophist once said, "Every one that loveth is born of God," and "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us" (1 John, 4:7, 12). Theosophical teachers have all repeated the old, old doctrine as the fundamental on which to build — the doctrine that the real human ego is not the poor weak creature he too often thinks he is, and exhibits to others, but a wondrous spiritual being in the innermost recesses of his nature, a divine mystery, and that it is within his power to find himself. A theosophist once said that to be one is "to have an unbounded belief in the greatness of man," to which we would add, "and to have found the beginning of the way to turn this belief into knowledge."

The Seven Principles of Man

When H. P. Blavatsky gave out the teachings about the nature of man, and delineated the seven human principles, she did not mean that these were six entities living in one house, the body. Some students have been tempted to look upon the seven principles from a rather mechanical standpoint, as if they were like the coats of an onion. H. P. Blavatsky selected the term as the best available, though she recognized that it was not quite satisfactory. It roughly expresses the concept of the compound nature of the human stream of consciousness, and, in default of better, we must continue to use it.

Few persons in the West have any conception of the real nature of their own constitution. Mr. A. and Mrs. B. regard themselves as — well, as beings who began to exist for the first time at birth and who will probably become extinct at death. They have a body with vital activities and more or less freedom of will besides their emotional and intellectual faculties. Some believe they "have" a soul and hope that their consciousness may bridge the gulf of death; but few have any certainty. Psychologists almost unanimously repudiate anything higher in human beings than the brain mind, which they study as a temporary product of the *organism* man, a specially intelligent animal. Some more intuitive thinkers regard man as a duality, consisting of "body" and "soul, mind, or spirit," the last terms being used in a very loose manner. The New Testament refers to three distinct aspects — body, soul, and spirit — a broad condensation of the ancient teaching of the sevenfold nature of man.

While it is possible to subdivide the aspects of human consciousness in several ways, and the septenary classification is not a hard and fast rule, it is the easiest for the beginner and it has the advantage of being in harmony with the sevenfold laws under which nature works in so many directions. We see the number seven in the primary colors of the visible spectrum familiar to all in the rainbow; in the periodic law of atomic weights, known as Mendeleeff's Law; in the periods of gestation and disease; in the septenary octaves of sound; and in many other phenomena. As Plato says, "God geometrizes." The universal employment of this number in religious symbology has great significance, and the deeper side of the septenary working of nature receives much attention in more advanced theosophical studies.

The septenary human constitution was taught in ancient Egypt, India, and elsewhere as a known fact. Some presentations of the teaching condensed these aspects of man's constitution into three main divisions with minor subdivisions, though the fundamental idea was the same. For there has always been positive knowledge about the real nature of man, and certain Teachers who knew how to prove it scientifically have not been lacking. The sages of antiquity were not groping in darkness: they knew the facts from ages of experimentation.

The "principles" may best be regarded, perhaps, as various stages or points of contact between the permanent center in each individual and the "planes" or grades of substance and consciousness in the universe, which stretch from the most ethereal or spiritual downward to gross matter. The permanent center, the monad (from the Greek for "unit,") clothes itself, so to speak, in vestures, or vehicles of similar nature to that of the planes into which it enters, until it reaches the physical body on the earth-plane, and a new personality is born.

This personality is so closely identified with the limited brain-consciousness that the illimitable fields of higher perception are shut off, only to be rarely glimpsed by the very few in their moments of spiritual

inspiration.

Among the more difficult problems in theosophy is that of the actual relationship of the god-spark with its offspring, the "principles," and that of the imbodiment of the god-spark in the personality of an ordinary human being. We can study them and gain much profit thereby, but the full solution can be achieved only by those lofty souls who have, through initiation into the Greater Mysteries, penetrated behind the veil of seeming.

It would be misleading to regard the seven principles as separate entities in the ordinary sense, or as seven souls. They are interblended around the monadic individuality, gathered or collected in human shape in such a way as to constitute the complete human being, although in only the rarest cases is the combination perfectly balanced. Such people we call mahatmas or elder brothers of the race.

No better illustration of the perfect human being can be given than the seven rays of the spectrum, which blend into the pure white light when harmoniously combined.

In view of the difficulties, the reader will easily understand that no elementary presentation of the seven principles can be entirely satisfactory; the arrangement given below is rather an approximation than a final statement. In trying to simplify such an abstract and subtle subject there is serious danger of materializing it. With this warning in mind we may consider the following table, which has been used for many years by theosophical writers: the upper three divisions represent the more spiritual and enduring principles, the lower four the more fleeting.

- Spirit — or *Atman*
- Spiritual Soul — or *Buddhi*
- Human Soul — or *Manas*
- Animal Soul — or *Kama*
- Vitality — or *Prana*
- Astral or Model Body — or *Linga-sarira*
- Physical Body — or *Sthula-sarira*

The words on the right are taken from the Sanskrit and are commonly used in theosophical literature in preference to the English words, which are not entirely satisfactory equivalents.

THE PHYSICAL BODY

Little need be said about the physical body, except that it is not composed of lifeless matter — nothing is. The concept of *dead* matter — dead in the sense of being inert unless activated from an outside force — is no longer a teaching of science: every atom is a focus of intense activity, and some eminent scientists even tell us that every point in space is throbbing with life — a quite theosophical doctrine.

Matter may be regarded as the universal life-essence considered in its passive or receptive aspect, and energy as the same in full activity. The human body is composed of a harmonious association of parts, all built of innumerable minute cells, each endowed with life and its own consciousness. Every cell is made of smaller life-elements, according to theosophy far more minute than our physical senses could detect even though aided by instruments more powerful than any microscope. The seemingly inert physical body is, then, a vast congeries of living beings of many orders and groupings, and is constructed on the principle of ascending hierarchies, which principle runs through the universe. An ancient philosophic aphorism says, "As above, so below," and even our lowest principle, the physical body, reflects the universe.

THE ASTRAL OR MODEL-BODY

The astral or model-body is not visible to ordinary eyesight, but under special conditions, or by certain sensitives, it may be seen. Broadly speaking, it is a shadowy duplicate of the physical body, composed of a rather finer grade of substance. More correctly, it is the physical that is the duplicate of the astral, for the latter is the model or pattern into which the ever-changing material atoms come for a time, then pass out. Ethereal

as it seems, it is exceedingly strong and cohesive and lasts throughout the entire incarnation. Without the backing of this semi-permanent astral model, the body could not maintain its shape or its individual peculiarities such as birthmarks, moles, etc. Ignorance of the existence of the astral body is one reason why psychologists find insuperable problems in their studies.

Knowledge of the astral double clears up the problem of the connection between mind and body; it is the link. It is a transformer, to use an expressive term in electricity, that can step down the higher to the lower vibrations. It is exceedingly plastic and sensitive, and responds instantly to thoughts and emotions. It transmits them to the physical body, upon which they produce visible effects. Everyone knows how extreme joy or rage can even kill, and the *stigmata* or marks of Christ's wounds developed on the persons of certain devotees are the results of impressions on the astral made by intense mental concentration. Experiments in hypnotism afford other examples. Cases are also recorded where injury to the astral when loosed from its protecting physical sheath, has left visible marks on the physical body. Inversely, the body can act on the mind through the astral link.

The astral body is formed before birth, and its character is strictly determined by causes created by the ego in past incarnations. Its plastic and sensitive constitution enables it to respond to the mental and emotional seeds coming to life in the new incarnation; in this way we are provided with a body in harmony with our deserts.

The term *astral body* is often loosely used to cover several divisions of the semi-physical inner body, and it includes psychomagnetic centers through which vital forces play. H. P. Blavatsky says very little about these details, but plainly indicates that attention to such matters is not advisable for those, like ourselves, who are striving in the earlier stages of spiritual development. Concentration upon the inner structure and working of the temporary astral or ethereal bodies is of no real service to workers for humanity and, indeed, it is not free from serious dangers. No doubt there is a place for such studies in the case of advanced disciples who are truly *impersonal and free from the desire to satisfy a hankering for the occult, and who have been accepted for training by a high teacher.*

The true student of theosophy is challenged, first of all, to purify his mind and desires and to work on spiritual lines by trying to show the path to a higher life to those who are in darkness. To dazzle them with psychic wonders only confuses them and increases the feeling of egoism.

After the death of the physical body the astral constituents gradually resolve into their elements, while the emotional-mental principles remain more or less conscious until the final separation called the "second death."

PRANA, OR THE LIFE PRINCIPLE

Prana is a Sanskrit word meaning "breath," the first necessity of physical life; but it has other related meanings. In the theosophical classification of the principles it means the vital force functioning through the astral, and in this respect it is a particular application of *jiva*, the ocean of life that permeates everything. The word *element* is more appropriate when speaking of prana, as it is not exactly a specialized vehicle of the monad like the *linga-sarira*. The physical and astral bodies are, of course, not made of inert or dead matter. Each life-atom is filled with its own energy, but, when acting through the formative principles, *jiva* or the universal life-force is specialized, so to speak, during the physical lifetime, returning to the great reservoir after death.

The physical body can be compared to a fabric, in the formation of which the astral is the warp and prana the shuttle that carries the thread; the interaction of the two weaves the fabric.

Prana, in one of its aspects, may be looked upon as constructive vitality, the driving force. Dr. de Purucker refers to it as the electrical veil or "electrical field" manifesting in the individual as vitality (see *The Esoteric Tradition*, 3rd & rev. ed., p. 433).

KAMA AND THE KAMA-RUPA

Kama means "desire," and *Kama-rupa* is the "body of desire." *Kama* is the balance principle in man, the fourth element counting from above or from below (see [diagrammatic table](#)). We share it with the animals, but in man the passional instincts are enhanced and intensified by the power of the imagination. The lower human nature, uncontrolled by the higher, is instinctual, self-centered, and inveterately attached to material, sensuous life. This desire for life, *tanha*, comes from *kama*; it brings us back to birth again and again. It is not a mere impulse of the "fleshly body," which is only a passive instrument. When controlled by the higher nature, however, and put to noble uses, desire is a great engine for good. Without some kind of desire we should simply vegetate.

Modern psychologists confound the human animal-soul with the higher principles, largely as a result of their identification of intelligent man with the perishable material brain and its nerve currents, and of ignorance of the real, immortal man behind the misleading appearances.

The desire element is universal, active on all planes. The worlds, visible and invisible, were brought forth "through the arising of desire in the Unknown First Cause" — desire, of course, of the most sublimated spiritual quality. In its highest human aspect it is aspiration and unselfish devotion; in its lowest, when centered on self, it degrades man below the beasts because he is then prostituting his reason to unworthy ends. It is the crucifixion of the Christos on the cross of matter. That which in the beasts is simple and natural because of the absence of the developed self-conscious mind, is debasement in man.

MANAS

Manas or mind, the essentially human element commonly called the fifth principle, forms the link between the Intermediate triad and the overshadowing spiritual ray and its parent monad.

While not a hard and fast arrangement, this triple division is convenient and suggestive because it harmonizes with the most familiar fact in our inner experience. Everyone knows that we have an intermediate self-conscious personality which is constantly being pulled in opposite directions by higher or lower forces *within ourselves*. This conflict is the outstanding fact in life; it needs no argument. Painful though it may be, it is the only method by which we can find our way to wisdom and the path of liberation.

Future human evolution depends upon our ability to release the intermediate self-conscious ego from the limitations of personality and to lift it into unity with the inner divinity by self-discipline and the irresistible power of impersonal love. So *manas* is the link between the god and the animal in man. Intrinsically colorless as regards good and evil, it has the power of choice, which is exercised by the use of the will. Drawn in opposite directions by higher and lower desires — impersonal or personal — it becomes dual, and the term higher ego, as employed in theosophy, may be taken as a general expression for *manas* when illuminated by the spiritual soul, *buddhi*. The lower self is that part of *manas* which is under the control of the more animal impulses. The former is a state of wisdom, love, harmony, and intuition — impersonality, in short; the latter, one of calculating egoism, cold brain-mind reasoning, and devotion to sense-desire.

The problem of the higher and lower *manas* is perhaps the most difficult for the beginner in theosophy, yet it is most important, for it brings us face to face with ourselves in a very real way. In one sense *manas* is the battleground on which our future is decided; it may take many incarnations, but for those who ardently aspire to perfection the time is greatly shortened. For more light on this great problem of the dual *manas*, the student must consult advanced theosophical literature.

Manas is but faintly expressed in the animal kingdom, which does not possess self-consciousness, foresight, and deliberate reasoning choice, although a few of the higher animals show traces of advancement, particularly those in close contact with man. It is not wise, however, to force their intelligence prematurely because of the risk of injury to their natural process of evolution. There is a sharp distinction between the animal and human kingdoms: man is not just a more highly evolved animal in the Darwinian sense; the animal mind has not developed into the human self-conscious mind. Man has a light of his own which illuminated or entered him at a certain definite period of the evolution of his lower vehicles. Self-conscious *manas* is the distinguishing feature of mankind, and it is not an outgrowth from the beast by natural selection or in any other way. The real man, the higher *manas*, may be said to overshadow, or even stand apart from,

his lower principles. As the manas becomes spiritualized and united with the sixth principle, buddhi, man becomes more than man — a self-conscious god. Manas may be regarded as a creative principle, a part of the cosmic creative mind.

ATMAN AND BUDDHI

Little can be said of these high themes, for few are prepared to understand the subtleties without long study and meditation. The divine atman or the monad, and the buddhi or spiritual soul, are the only abiding human principles, and properly speaking they overshadow us and do not manifest as part of the ordinary personality. Only in the perfected Adept is the buddhic principle fully manifested. We read in *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*:

The supreme energy resides in the *Buddhi*; latent — when wedded to *Atman* alone — active and irresistible when galvanized by the essence of "Manas" and when none of the dross of the latter commingles with that pure *essence* to weigh it down by its finite nature. — p. 341

The great teacher, Buddha, calls the sixth principle (buddhi) the fire that burns in the eternal light. It is the unshackled spirit that sees things of the divine world without a veil.

Speaking of Atman, the "One Reality," H. P. Blavatsky writes:

. . . *Atman*, is no individual property of any man, but is the Divine essence which has no body, no form, . . . It only overshadows the mortal; that which enters into him and pervades the whole body being only its omnipresent rays, or light, radiated through *Buddhi*, its vehicle and direct emanation. — *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 101

To make it more conceivable to the human intellect, when first attempting the study of Occultism, and to solve the A B C of the mystery of man, Occultism calls this *seventh* principle [atman] the synthesis of the sixth, and gives it for vehicle the *Spiritual Soul*, *Buddhi*. Now the latter conceals a mystery which is never given to anyone, with the exception of irrevocably pledged *chelas* [disciples of an initiate] or those, at any rate, who can be safely trusted. — *Ibid.*, pp. 119-20

Atman is far beyond our mental possibility of comprehension, and the buddhic principle can only be very dimly imagined. We can try to picture the latter as a glorious radiance of spiritual illumination gradually penetrating the purified manas. *Buddhi* without manas is not self-conscious for us and cannot act on mental planes, but when the two have become united man becomes more than man. As the spiritual state thus attained infinitely transcends the limitations of personality as we regard it, it is clear that purification of the mind from every trace of egoism by long continued effort through many incarnations is essential.

Again we see why the real teachers tell us the same old story: "Love the brethren," and find the god within yourself. It is the only way to the heart of the universe, and that is why membership in the Theosophical Society is based on the belief in universal brotherhood and not on creed or dogma.

The principles or elements in man's complex nature are sometimes grouped in three interlocking divisions: upper, intermediate, and lower or mortal. See table below.

UPPER TRIAD

Atman — Spirit, the inner god, the divine monad.

Buddhi — Ray, proceeding from atman.

Manas — Human soul, in its higher aspect

INTERMEDIATE

Manas — Human soul, with its higher and lower aspects.

Kama — Principle of desire.

LOWER

Linga-sarira — Astral or design body.

Prana — Vitality.

Sthula-sarira — Physical body.

The *linga-sarira*, the link between the lower and the intermediate triads, may be regarded as the soul of the lower or the body of the intermediate.

Reincarnation or Reimbodiment in Flesh

Reincarnation is a very ancient and worldwide doctrine. It is a particular instance of the general law of reimbodiment which applies not only to human beings but even to planets, suns, and universes.

When the Theosophical Society was founded reincarnation was a new and strange idea to the Western world, although almost universally known in the East. It was ridiculed in the popular press and confused with the crude notion of transmigration into animals, which theosophy rejects. "Once a man always a man," until a still higher state is attained, is the theosophical teaching. The work of H. P. Blavatsky has so enormously modified Western thought that reincarnation has been adopted by innumerable persons who recognize that it is the only rational explanation of the enigmas of life, especially of the inequalities of birth and opportunity. Reincarnation is now treated seriously in literature and by all advanced thinkers; it is a familiar theme in fiction and drama. The English Poet Laureate, Masfield, like so many famous poets, is a reincarnationist. Reincarnation brought a new outlook on life, a new key to the divine nature of man, a rational explanation of evolution, to the Occident.

Reincarnation is briefly defined as the doctrine that man lives many times on earth as a human being, the conditions of each incarnation being the natural result of the causes set in motion in former lives. Between incarnations the higher nature enjoys a blissful interval of rest and happiness in a subjective state. When his evolution has progressed as far as possible on this globe, man will advance to higher spheres.

This condensed definition would be misleading without a clear idea of what is meant by "man." It has been explained already that man is a compound, permanent in the higher elements, mortal in the lower. The higher spiritual part, when incarnated, creates, as it were, a false or temporary personality, endowed with the feeling of "I am I," having a vivid sense of separateness from others of its kind, and of identity with the body. In this personality it lives, forgetting its higher state, like a man suffering from amnesia or what science calls dual personality in which two utterly different intelligences alternately occupy the same body. (See Dr. Morton Prince's classic on the subject, in which examples are given showing that while one personality knew all that the second was doing, the latter was quite ignorant of the life and actions of the former.) In the normal person, flashes of the higher immortal consciousness pierce the veil in accordance with his advancement.

It is not strictly true to say that one's present personality, one's everyday consciousness of self, lived before or will live again. Nature is too wise, too merciful, to allow us to drag this personality around with us forever, with its limitations, its weaknesses, and above all, with its unhappy memories. Fortunately we are ever changing, growing, learning. The word "personality" (from *persona*, a "mask") well describes the temporary instrument put forth by the higher self to gain experience in this world. But the personality is not necessarily annihilated. As it strives and suffers and purifies itself, it receives more and more light from above, it becomes nearer the image of the "Father"; and even though the personality of any one life is far from pure, its nobler qualities and memories are never lost, but are withdrawn at death into the real man. All that perishes is

that which is not worth preserving.

There are many who cannot accept the theory that man as he appears — the commonplace personality — is immortal, and yet who feel dissatisfied with the notion that such a marvelous being, with such powers of mind and heart, can perish without leaving a trace. Many earnest believers in the immortality of the soul also are troubled because of the lack of so-called scientific proof that their intuition is right and that the soul does survive. To both classes the concept of reincarnation, when fully understood, comes as a blessed relief, a complete solution of their problems.

Those who accept the idea of a future life of the soul are logically compelled to ask themselves what it was doing before birth. All admit that the body perishes, but if there is an immortal part, how can immortality (or infinity — the same conception) extend only in one direction? How can it have a beginning? This problem has never been logically answered except on the basis of pre-existence, and that carries with it the suggestion that if the soul has actually once descended into physical life from a more ethereal state, why should it not have done so before, in obedience to the universal law of periodicity or cyclic progression?

Human life is a continuum, and the breaks between incarnations when the soul returns to less material conditions are only a larger expression of what is familiar to us in the alternations of sleeping and waking. Reincarnation in bodily form is only a special case of the universal cosmic principle of periodic or cyclic law which runs through everything.

H. P. Blavatsky places cyclic law among the three fundamentals of the ancient wisdom: as she says in *The Secret Doctrine* (1:17):

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.

And in the third fundamental proposition we read of

. . . the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul — a spark of the former [the Universal Over-Soul] — through the Cycle of Incarnation . . . 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.

We are all familiar with the cycles of day and night; of waking and sleeping; the changes of the seasons and their effects; the rise and fall of nations; the fluctuations of trade; the lunar changes, the great astronomical cycles; and with many others in human, animal, and vegetable life. Man, as a soul, is no exception to the great law, and his progress through incarnations on earth, alternating with periods of repose in spiritual planes, is only a part of greater and grander cycles.

When the body is worn out, its particles dispersed for a while, and the higher purified part of the late personality withdrawn into the true self, the latter has by no means closed its connection with earth. It is responsible for the past, it has left many unfinished tasks, and it has not yet realized a fraction of its divine possibilities as an imbodyed spirit. Humanity as a race — with a very few exceptions — is still in its childhood and will remain so until its real divinity is revealed in its fullness. The human personality as we know it today — the mask of the real person — is only a poor semblance of the glorious being to come. Reincarnation is the only possible method of such an evolution.

But after "life's fitful fever," rest and recuperation are needed, and the reincarnating ego, purified by the shedding of the lower elements in kama-loka, the region of desire, and free from all that can hold it to the earth's attraction, passes through the "second death" into the rest and bliss of devachan, leaving the passions, the mistakes, and the sorrowful memories to perish with the body. It remains in this state of high spiritual consciousness for approximately one hundred times the length of the last incarnation, more or less, according to the character of the individual; and then a fresh incarnation is entered on, in harmony with cyclic law. As Katherine Tingley often said, we are given "another chance" to redeem the past, until we learn our lesson of spiritual attainment.

The medieval notion of escaping from life's responsibilities to an *eternal* heaven of bliss is petty and selfish in comparison with the doctrine of reincarnation. Reincarnation provides for the needed rest and happiness, but it does far more, by giving the opportunity of working again for the welfare of the great human family to which we belong. It leads to the brotherhood of mankind. When a certain high stage of spiritual development is reached, no further incarnation is needed on earth; the inexpressible bliss of nirvana is in sight; the soul becomes free and incarnation a matter of choice. Nothing nobler can be imagined than the voluntary sacrifice of nirvana for the purpose of returning to help humanity on its weary way; and this is the ideal of perfect love offered by the sublime teachings of the ancient wisdom. The Great Ones make this sacrifice.

The Law of Karma

Reincarnation, the natural method by which the soul learns its lessons, logically implies that we experience the results of our actions in former lives. "Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?" said Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, when he was teaching the law of karma.

Karma is essentially the law of adjustment of causes to effects, the restoration of broken harmony, "even after many days." We cannot deny the law of cause and effect in the material world, but theosophy carries it farther than that for it shows that this law goes to the root of all being. It is just as unerring in regard to a deed of love or mercy, or hate and cruelty, as in the falling of a stone. It would be horrible to live in a world where nature could not be trusted to be consistent, where water sometimes ran uphill or the stars faltered in their courses! But, mercifully, the "divine custom" of karma is equally consistent in the adjustment of life in every aspect.

A most important aspect of Karma is that a period of apparently "bad" karma — suffering and trial — may not be really a misfortune, but a magnificent opportunity for an individual to develop noble capacities: "Gold is tried in the fire." W. Q. Judge says "good" karma is that which the soul requires for its evolution, even though it be distasteful. It is said that the inner self chooses the rough path at times to quicken its progress. Even the outer personality does this when it sees the need. The human will can always start new causes, and some of these may cancel previous ones, as one factor cancels another in a problem in mathematics.

Physical suffering may be unavoidable, but according to the way in which it is taken, so will be the effect on the character, good or bad. Then again, many devoted souls deliberately enter upon self-sacrificing work for others that will inevitably lead to exterior suffering; yet this pain is not produced by evil intent, but contrariwise. This subject leads to profound problems which are dealt with in larger theosophical works.

The doctrine of karma is one of the most difficult subjects that can occupy the reasoning mind, and only those who have advanced far on the path and have developed high powers of perception can properly follow its ramifications and complexities. There are, however, leading features that we can easily understand and which prove its superiority to any other attempt to explain the inequalities of life. We can consider only a few points here, chiefly those relating to reincarnation.

We all know that a person is practically certain to break a limb if he falls from a cliff, but what is not clear is why some persons will "miraculously" escape without injury. We all know perfectly authentic accounts of such escapes which the wildest fiction magazine would hesitate to publish. On the other hand, many persons have suffered from extraordinary "accidents" occurring under conditions in which no danger at all seemed to threaten.

It is strange indeed that people who accept the Christian teaching, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7), can speak of "accidents" and fail to carry the Biblical doctrine of cause and effect to its logical conclusion — the pre-existence of the soul and reincarnation.

Science is very positive that physical causes produce equivalent physical effects, and common observation proves that sowing wild oats in youth produces a crop of trouble in old age — *if the sower lives long enough*. But if not? Does he then escape scot free?

Theosophy shows that compensation is meted out in another incarnation if necessary. Nothing can be more simple, more just. The harvest is reaped where the seeds were sown. By the suppression in the Western world of the teachings of reincarnation and karma, the natural intuition that has led mankind to believe that causes started during life must work out somewhere, here or hereafter, has been perverted to crude dogmas of *eternal* bliss and *eternal* damnation. These notions have at last been found so disproportionate to any reasonable idea of compensation that even the churches are dropping them. Hell is no longer popular, and Heaven is exceedingly vague. Yet there *is* compensation, and the key to the problem lies open to view in the very book, "esoterically so wise," whose teachings have so long been misunderstood by its professed followers. Reincarnation and karma are not only mentioned in veiled terms in the Bible, but are *explicitly* taught. This is discussed in a later chapter.

The apparent injustice of the allotment of opportunity in coming into this world has been the despair of the one-life thinkers who have dared to face the problem. Not only are we born into a certain family and nation and race, into good or bad surroundings, born healthy or sickly or crippled, but we start with a definite moral and intellectual character not easy to modify, even with great effort.

Some favored persons receive every possible assistance in leading a noble life; others are born in misery and crime, and get nothing but kicks. The popular and thoroughly unscientific view is that it is all a matter of chance or luck, which simply means that the problem is given up as hopeless. And it is hopeless on the one-life theory; it is worse, it is blasphemous, for it implies that the world is not governed by law, but is a crazy patchwork of "effects" with no adequate causes.

How the picture changes when we learn of reincarnation and karma; how beneficent and orderly life becomes! We have been looking heretofore on the wrong side of the tapestry and seeing nothing but irregular patches and loose ends. When we realize that our fate is in our own hands, that we are not only paying for or profiting by the acts of the past but that we are making our own future under the unerring divine law of karma and that we can rely upon absolute justice — which is truest mercy — being done, our whole attitude to life changes. Instead of seeing law and order in the physical world only, we find that nature is a unity and that the same principle acts throughout all planes, mental, psychic, and spiritual. It is as potent in the smallest events in our lives as in the falling of a stone or the action of the chemical elements. We repeat again that human life is a continuum and the link between incarnations is karma, the law of the equivalence between action and reaction. In Sanskrit the word means "action."

Another point about karma and reincarnation is the way they clear up problems in heredity, such as the appearance of great geniuses or of degenerates, from normal parentage. Scientists have offered no satisfactory explanation of these and other mysteries of heredity, as they freely admit. And no wonder, for they cannot be explained without introducing the factors of karma and reincarnation. The provision of a certain kind of personality by heredity is the natural method by which the real self gets the most suitable mental and physical apparatus for its next earth-life. It is naturally attracted to the conditions in which its karma can be most effectively worked out; but they do not necessarily cover the whole ground. Not all the crops sown in any one life can be reaped in the next; some have to wait till the appropriate time. But heredity, as ordinarily understood, is not the *governing* principle of our lives, for as H. P. Blavatsky says:

the law of Karma, racial or individual, overrides the subordinate tendencies of "Heredity," its servant. — *The Secret Doctrine* 2:178

The real governing principle is *the person himself* who determines his own future by every act and thought. Do not regard karma as an outside fate or something which we must put up with against our will. Our karma is what we have made for ourselves, what we have inbuilt into our own characters.

Above all, do not look upon karma as either *punishment* for sins or *reward* for virtues, doled out by some over-ruling Providence. It is the *consequence* that inevitably follows an action as "the wheel follows the ox," according to the Oriental simile. Whatever "forgiveness" of sins may mean, it does not imply the blotting out of their consequences. In *The Secret Doctrine* H. P. Blavatsky says:

For the only decree of Karma — an eternal and immutable decree — is absolute Harmony in the

world of matter as it is in the world of Spirit. It is not, therefore, Karma that rewards or punishes, but it is we, who reward or punish ourselves according to whether we work with, through and along with nature, abiding by the laws on which that Harmony depends, or — break them. —
1:643

The subject of karma in nature and man is as fascinating as it is profound, and the student will find many difficulties discussed and clarified in more advanced theosophical literature.

Man after Death

Death is not the King of Terrors, but a kindly liberator, a blessed release for the spirit; painless in itself, and the door to rest and unspeakable bliss. "Death is birth" in a very real sense. It is a perfectly natural process, necessary to human evolution through its cycle of earth-lives; it is as necessary as sleep, which it closely resembles in more ways than one. Death of the physical body cannot be transcended until mankind reaches a higher degree of development, when conditions and we ourselves will have changed.

Death, however, is not a final release; it is not what Eastern philosophy speaks of as crossing to, or reaching, the "other shore." That is a poetical term for attainment of the knowledge of the inner god, the result of striving through many deaths and births. It is the state of high adeptship.

Those to whom the inner planes of nature are like an open book, who, through spiritual development and initiation, have pierced the veil in full consciousness, have given us an outline of the stages of progress and liberation after death which is logical, scientific, and harmonious with our highest ideals.

Briefly put, the outstanding elements are these: the worn-out physical body having been laid aside, the semi-physical astral body rapidly disintegrates, and a process of preparation follows in which the human ego is gradually liberated from the lower, worldly, and common desires. The lower mind is passed, so to speak, through a process of sublimation like that of metal which is purified by heat from dross, leaving the desire principle with the lower memories of the late personality to fade out as an active force.

Sometimes that principle is so strong and coherent that it can remain a long time as a delusive or pseudo-personality, called the kama-rupa (desire body), but the true human ego passes onward, leaving the semblance or residue of the former personality destitute of its *spiritual* qualities, though it may temporarily retain a measure of consciousness and even memory.

The real human ego or monad, released from the lower passional elements, that is, having passed through the "second death," enters the devachanic state where it enjoys unbounded felicity in a "heaven-world," the subjective creation of its highest spiritual thoughts and aspirations "in the bosom of the divine monad."

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come. . . . — *Hamlet*, Act III, Sc. i

The purified human ego has in its own devachanic cycle a full awakening into spiritual consciousness, a culmination, and a decline into the lethargy that precedes the next incarnation on earth. The karmic seeds begin to sprout as the cycle completes its round, and then a new-born babe sees the light of common day.

At the moment of death, before the unconsciousness preceding the preparation for devachan, the ego sees a complete panorama of the events of the past life unroll before its inner sight. Every event is seen in its proper relationship, all acts and thoughts are self-judged, and even the smallest are shown to have been subject to the impersonal law of justice — karma. Before rebirth, also, a similar picture unrolls, that of the conditions the human ego will meet in the coming incarnation, what it has made for itself by its own past acts and thoughts. Everything is made plain, and thus in the coming incarnation, when the outer personality, which is ignorant of the past karmic causes, curses fate and protests bitterly against the ill luck that dogs his footsteps, the inner self has no complaint, for it knows it is the harvest of the old seeds. When we find the key to knowledge and learn to look within we shall all know it, and have peace amid outer tribulation. Those who do not repine at the buffetings of life have already an intuitive knowledge of this, though they may not be able to analyze their feelings.

Exceptional cases and modifying circumstances in *post-mortem* states cannot be discussed here, but we cannot omit to mention a very important process that takes place after the death of the body and during the devachanic state of the human ego, but which does not consciously affect it, for this pertains exclusively to the higher monad, the essential self, from which the human ego or monad issued forth when it took up its last incarnation and to which it returns for rest and spiritual refreshment.

This process, a very wonderful one, consists in the peregrination of the spiritual monad from planet to planet of the seven sacred planets so-called, as it follows the pathways known as the *outer round*. In this outer round the higher monad gains experiences of life and matter which are different from those it has had on our earth, but which are necessary to its own progress. Though the human monad or ego rests within the higher monad, it does not partake of these experiences, which are not available to it until it has reached a far higher stage. The human monad remains in its devachanic bliss while the spiritual parent sojourns for a while on each of the sacred planets. This sublime subject must in no way be confused with the *inner round*, the pilgrimage through the "seven globes" (not "planets") of the terrestrial chain.

Theosophy, in accord with the teaching of the great seers and sages of the ages, discountenances efforts to raise the shades of the departed, and protests strongly against the production of materializations or temporary simulacra of the dead body. Theosophy does not deny the reality of many phenomena of the seance room. In fact, H. P. Blavatsky began her public work with the Spiritualists because she knew they were more broadminded about psychic phenomena than the scientists or theologians of that day, and she hoped that they would welcome the light that Eastern philosophy throws upon the whole subject.

According to the ancient wisdom, the spiritual ego never by any possibility "materializes," and with the exception of a few suicides and victims of accident, the ordinary run of communications can be traced to the kama-rupa or pseudo-personality that still hankers for contact with the earth-plane, though it is but a shell from which the higher triad has withdrawn, like a butterfly from its abandoned chrysalis. Another confusion, and a very frequent one, arises from the pranks of nature-spirits, elementals, who can vivify the fading spectral shades and simulate the deceased personality, as they often mockingly boast.

It must be clearly understood that the astral world, particularly in its more accessible regions, is filled with subtle delusions, in which the untrained explorer, however intelligent, is quickly lost in a maze of error. The door once opened is hard to shut, as many have learned to their cost by ignorantly dabbling in the so-called occult arts or by attempting to develop the lower psychic powers, erroneously called spiritual.

The complex nature of the stream of consciousness that constitutes a human being is hardly suspected in the Western world, still less the geography of the invisible planes.

The sensible thing for us is to leave the astral plane *to those whose duty compels them to investigate its delusions*; to those who have passed through the necessary training in self-control and self-knowledge, who are not seeking for the satisfaction of mere intellectual curiosity, and who are protected by the strong armor of impersonal love. For us, our school of experience is here and now, in the events of daily life.

This, of course, does not imply that a philosophical study should not be made of the collected knowledge and teachings on the subject of psychism and the laws underlying the phenomena. W. Q. Judge says:

Our philosophy explains the facts already at hand, and shows distinctly how the virtues and excellences of character must be developed and realized before we are at all ready for practically touching the psychic forces. At the same time, by giving a sufficient analysis of man's composite nature it tends to prevent and do away with all superstition in respect to the many psychic phenomena that daily have place. . . . — *The Theosophical Forum*, August 1894

The temporary comfort given to the bereaved by alleged communications given at the expense of the mediums is more than off set by evils that are explained in theosophy. If we truly love our departed friends we shall not try to drag them back to this earth plane, from which they have ascended to the unspeakable peace of devachan. Even the kama-rupa, the shell, should not be revived and given a semblance of life and intelligence. It is an outrage on nature's kindly process of disintegration. Let us leave our friends to their

natural path onward and inward, with full faith that if we truly love them we cannot fail to meet again, for love attracts its own. In the Orient, the calling up of the shades is regarded as unseemly or worse, and the dangers inherent in mediumship are only too well known.

But we are not altogether separated from the friends we loved in life, even now. There is a possibility of a very real communion between our spiritual ego and theirs. This occurs in sleep when we are released from the limitations of the lower personality, and our better self, the higher manas, withdraws to high spiritual states. Very rarely can even a trace of such communion be recollected on waking, though a sense of having passed through some splendid experience may remain. Such experiences, however, are far removed from the commonplaces of the ordinary seance room or the astral explorations of psychical research.

The great teachers tell us that to know life we must know death, and that the adventure of life in its entirety includes the intervals between incarnations, for death of the temporary vehicle is only a door to new experiences for the true ego. But the adventures of the spiritual ego can be followed only by those who have advanced to high spiritual consciousness, who have passed beyond the veil through initiation. Others can touch only the outer fringe of knowledge.

The Adept and the medium are at opposite poles. The former cannot be dominated by unknown forces or entities; his training brings forth the positive, godlike qualities. He is a Master of life, not a passive agent ignorant of the laws of even the semi-material astral regions.

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Theosophy and Science

(written 1948)

When H. P. Blavatsky brought theosophy to the West she severely criticized the materialistic limitations of the leading scientists, and offered a more philosophic scheme of nature. Her teachings seemed to them so unusual and unconventional that they were generally ignored; science was busy liberating Western thought from ecclesiastical fetters, and anything that savored of spiritual ideals was not favored by it. Today we see a change. A large number, perhaps a majority, of her fundamental teachings in physics are either fully accepted by leading thinkers or are matters of serious discussion and research. This transformation was foreseen by her, as she stated that the secret doctrine of the ages sketched by her in the book of that name would begin to be recognized in the twentieth century. And although science has not yet become spiritualized, extraordinary developments leading away from mechanistic interpretations have already taken place.

It is to be regretted, however, that while science is getting free from crass materialism, it still maintains that human beings are merely higher, perishable animals, so far as it has ascertained. The survival of man after death — the spirit, soul, the passional elements or what not — reincarnation, even the existence of a soul, are not subjects of serious discussion at scientific congresses. They are set aside with ghosts and religious superstitions as curious specimens of folklore, if mentioned at all. This has all to be changed before real progress can be made.

A fundamental principle in theosophy is that mind is not a fleeting production of matter "like the noise of a machine," or something that has casually "happened" as the result of an unusual combination of elements. It is a universal principle in the cosmos, and the human mind is one aspect of it.

To show how theosophical principles have succeeded in penetrating modern scientific thought, numerous quotations could be given from the leading scientists. Even Sir James Jeans, who still clings to the mechanistic interpretation of many phenomena, dares to say that the universe looks more like a great thought than a great machine, and that Mind is not an "accidental intruder into the realm of matter" as the materialists conceive, but rather the ruler and controller of the material world. In fact, he believes that matter is not only created by mind but is really a manifestation of it. Man himself he says, is not an *accidental intruder* into universe of purely chemical and mechanic forces, after all. When he says that "God" seems to be like a "great Mathematician," he is approaching the teaching of the initiate Plato, who taught that "God geometrizes." Sir James Jeans also speaks of the great stream of universal life of which we are an integral part.

Sir Oliver Lodge reiterates some of the teachings of theosophy when he says that we live in the midst of a spiritual world which dominates the material. This spiritual and omnipresent reality has properties which exhaust our admiration, so much so that they would be terrifying but that we may be sure that those tremendous forces are controlled by "a beneficent power whose name is Love." If the student of theosophy turns to H. P. Blavatsky's *Voice of the Silence* he will find:

Canst thou destroy divine COMPASSION? Compassion is no attribute. It is the LAW of LAWS
— eternal Harmony, Alaya's SELF; . . . the law of love eternal.

Professor Whitehead speaks of the universe being designed by a "poet," and others go so far as to declare that "the power upon which man depends for his very existence is supreme in thought, poetry, and love."

Dr. E. B. Frost, Director of the Yerkes Observatory, declares that there is a definite cosmic mind behind the universe. He says:

all the seemingly aimless movements of astral bodies, and happenings that we now think of as phenomena, will be recognized as being perfectly coordinated into a system whose vastness is astounding to contemplate.

The new attitude of the most advanced scientists avoids the notion of a limited Personal God, and closely approaches the theosophical position.

In *Man in Evolution*, G. de Purucker has carefully discussed the approach of modern physics to theosophy. Here we can touch on only a few outstanding points. In astronomy, chemistry, physics, and even biology, science is approaching the ancient wisdom. The former distinction between energy and mass (or force and matter, if you prefer) has disappeared; dense matter has become a congeries of electric charges, unknown quantities; the hard indivisible atom is now a world of intensely active forces in eternal motion — a most important theosophical concept. Einstein, in trying to coordinate all the natural forces, is simply working out mathematically the Eastern principle of *fohat*, so prominent in *The Secret Doctrine*.

The law of cycles, another fundamental in theosophy, is being found to extend far more widely than was suspected by scientists, and to constitute an essential part of evolution. A modern suggestion — an expanding and contracting universe — irresistibly suggests the ancient wisdom of the East with its outbreathing and inbreathing of Brahma. Another extremely interesting development of science is the principle of indeterminacy, which implies that the known physical laws of cause and effect are not sufficient to explain everything, but that there are possibilities we have not fathomed. That is a step toward the recognition of the law of karma, a higher aspect of causation than the convenient but incomplete physical explanation of natural law. The unsatisfactory explanation of individual differences of character by heredity, and of good or ill fortune by environment (logically explained by karma and reincarnation), may easily be abandoned by scientists when indeterminacy has been studied more deeply.

Although Darwin's evolution offered nothing deeper than physical transformation without intelligent aim or direction, his work was valuable in breaking up dogmatic superstitions and popularizing the idea of evolution as opposed to "special Creation." But it was one-sided. It overlooked the interior, invisible, but very real essence pushing its way outward and onward, molding material forms toward higher states, each expression of life being better fitted to display the powers of the monad or spirit as they unfolded or *e-volved* from the inexhaustible store within. The forms are like a ladder up which the real climber ascends; the rungs are not the climber. Man is not a "monkey shaved" as the wit remarks, but an atom of the divine life, moving onward to full self-conscious godhood.

Humankind has passed through many states of matter less dense than the physical, and these ethereal states called for bodies of similar nature. Traces of these are hidden in the complex of human principles already discussed. The transformations of the embryo in the prenatal state reflect some of these in brief.

In common with humanity, our globe has not always been in its present condition of matter; it was once more ethereal, and is in process of becoming so again. This does not mean a mere transformation of gaseous into liquid or solid states, but a cyclic transformation of the very nature of matter in ways not yet known to

science, though the so-called ectoplasm of the psychic researchers may give them a hint when they reason more deeply. The descent into present conditions, and the ascent therefrom, are intimately connected with human evolution, and Dr. Jean's remark that man is not altogether "an intruder" is a real advance toward the truth as taught by the ancient philosophers, such as the Oriental sage, Patanjali:

The Universe, including the visible and the invisible, . . . exists for the sake of the soul's experience and emancipation. — *Yoga Aphorisms*

Evolution through Globes, Rounds, and Races

Hardly more than a reference to the earlier stages of human and terrestrial evolution can be made in our limited space, but a very brief outline is necessary to understand what follows.

The earth is one of a chain of seven "globes" which all constitute one organism, as we may call it. The other six are not visible to our gross senses, but they interpenetrate our material globe. The vast stream of human monads circulates seven times around the seven globes, after which the chain will perish. We are now in the fourth round of the great pilgrimage of monads around the seven globes, and our familiar earth is the fourth globe of the chain. We are also in the fifth evolution, or fifth great race or root-race, of experience on this globe. After passing through two more transformations or great humanities we shall move to the next globe, a far more spiritual condition of being.

In the first three rounds man was hardly more than a shadowy suggestion of what he has become, and a discussion of that subject is beyond the scope of the present Manual. We must pass to the fourth round with its seven great or root-races, in which evolution takes more easily comprehended forms.

Each root-race, with its numerous subraces and minor branches, is practically a humanity in itself, with its own specializations and environment. It is separated from its successor by great geological changes, and only a comparatively few survivors remain to provide the seed for the next root-race.

Even in the fourth round the host of human monads came at the beginning into very nebulous or ethereal forms, not at all like the physical bodies of our time. As the monads had not evolved the manas or mentality, and as the sexes were not separated in the first root-race of this fourth round, it was little more than the shadow of later humanity.

The first root-race gradually developed on its own lines, and then gave way to the second root-race, of a more substantial nature; and this to the third, which became quite material toward its close, when the present method of reproduction was fixed and when civilization dawned.

The third root-race was succeeded by the fourth, a highly intelligent though materialistic humanity. It chiefly inhabited extensive lands now covered by the Atlantic Ocean. Intellectual progress made a great advance, but spiritual development was slow. About halfway through the fourth, our present race, the fifth, was born, but it increased very slowly until the Atlantean civilization had been practically destroyed by widespread geological cataclysms. Modern science is now beginning to trace a fraction of the past history of the fifth root-race, which is the only one known, for nearly every vestige of the former races and their worlds, as their environment may be called, has been wiped out.

In the far distant future we too shall disappear and yield place to the sixth root-race, a much higher humanity, and that to the seventh, in which human beings will walk the earth almost as gods. We are, moreover, on the upward arc now, for the lowest point was reached about the middle of the Atlantean period.

Although nearly every material trace of the archaic races has disappeared, traditions have been preserved of their existence and character. These are found in the various sacred books of the East, the Bible included, which, if taken literally, are incomprehensible, but which, by those who have the key to their true historical meaning, are found to contain real and valuable information. H. P. Blavatsky devoted many chapters of *The Secret Doctrine* to the interpretation of these historical allegories.

While theosophy emphatically teaches evolution, and on the grandest scale, in the cosmos and in man, it rejects every theory (such as the ape-ancestry one) that is purely mechanistic and that deals only with the perishable body while ignoring the real evolver, the monad or spirit in man. Evolution does not proceed in an ascending straight line. The monad descended from ethereal states and gradually entered into denser conditions, ultimately utilizing physical forms in harmony with the lowest part of the cycle. With the ascending return to more ethereal states, human bodily vestures will also be transformed. The monad, buddhi, and also the manas, are no "by-products" of a brain of flesh; still less are they "natural" evolutions from the lower animals. The anthropoid apes have, indeed, some human blood as well as animal in their veins, but they are not our ancestors. The origin of the anthropoids is partially traceable to early and degenerate human sources; they are the product of miscegenation.

Considering the complexity of the problem of the origin of the human body and the confusion caused by the existence of the anthropoids, it is no wonder that science has not solved it. This subject is fully treated by H. P. Blavatsky, but the point to be emphasized here is that while evolution is fundamental in theosophy it is not regarded as a mere transformation of bodily form through increasing complexities of organization brought about by mechanical laws. As the ego behind the outer shell gains experience, new latent capacities unfold and a change in the physical vehicle naturally follows. The body, instead of being an end in itself, is an instrument through which the unfolding powers express themselves. Human evolution reflects the larger cosmic evolution in its cyclic method of progress.

Something must be said here about the help given to evolving humanity by spiritual intelligences from higher planes, and of more advanced degree, who incarnate in or overshadow developing mankind. By a universal occult law the higher sacrifices itself, so to speak, to help the lower to bring out its latent potentialities, and this applies to other kingdoms as well as the human. In mankind this took place when the mind became illuminated toward the end of the third root-race of the present fourth round. The ancient traditions record this very important evolutionary factor — not suspected yet by science — without which real human development cannot be understood. The famous biologist Dr. Russel Wallace intuitively suggested that the mind definitely incarnated in mankind at a certain early stage, but science rejected the idea, preferring its mechanistic theories of natural selection and survival of the fittest, which however are being seriously discredited nowadays as the vital factors in evolution.

Psychology and Theosophy

Psychology is defined as the "science of the soul" or the "study of human consciousness," but it is a very uncertain science and its professors are divided into many conflicting schools. Some psychologists repudiate the soul altogether, and regard human consciousness as a temporary phenomenon existing during life, just as the noise of a machine continues while it is running. Others are less materialistic, and suspect some kind of being not entirely dependent on the brain machine. The discovery of something vaguely called the subliminal consciousness, an intelligence that only rarely and under special conditions comes to the surface, has done a little to break the ranks of materialistic psychology, but it has brought its own evils, particularly by giving excuse for the excesses of a certain school which regards the underlying subconscious intelligence as being dominated by sexual impulses. Although there are signs of an improvement in some quarters, modern psychology grubs around far too much in the grimy cellars of the mind; it seems to dread the upper and airy chambers of the soul, illuminated by the sunlight.

Theosophy repudiates with scorn the notion that man is inherently vile at bottom, the modern psychological version of the exploded belief that every child is "born in sin" and doomed to perdition. It declares the old, old teaching, repeated by the initiate Paul, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). The higher self is the subliminal consciousness we should concentrate on, and the helpful psychology is that which brings divinity into our shadowed lives. In another passage Paul expresses the same gnostic or theosophical principle:

My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ [the christos spirit or buddhic splendor] be formed in you. — Gal. 4:19

Much is said today about self-expression, which generally means the free play of the common emotional impulses. The results are all around us. *Self-expression* has a sublime meaning to the theosophist: it is the permeation of the whole personal nature by the divine radiance of the higher self, and it makes us more than the ordinary, workaday personality. Psychologists try to interpret the facts of consciousness from outside observation, and the human nature they explore is what is called in theosophy the lower personality, and even of that a large part is ignored. What do they know about the astral and kamic states? Theosophy begins within; it shows you how to explore the recesses of your own personality courageously, for the key to knowledge lies in self-discipline. Theosophy is intensely practical, and by following its teaching the disciple can find his own way to the heart of the universe.

The intellectual aspect of theosophy is of immense importance if studied with impersonal spiritual development and the benefit of others — universal brotherhood — always in sight, but it is only one of the factors in the Great Work — the finding of the inner god, the "immortal region" within. For instance, it is very useful indeed to learn nature's method of evolution through reincarnation, and the value of knowing about karma can hardly be overestimated, but first of all we are seeking *regeneration*, and this means getting free from the sense of separation from the diviner self. We must learn how to avoid the accentuation of the separate lower self, in order to find the meaning and the joy of impersonality.

This is the real study of psychology. The revelations of self-knowledge bring the power of helping others. When the lower desires have been transmuted, when an individual has become so impersonal as really to love his neighbor as himself, freely to forgive injuries, to act from the highest standpoint on all occasions, he will find that he can understand the troubles of others, and his intuition will grow so strong that he will know exactly what to do under all circumstances. This is no vain promise; it is a known definite result of the sincere effort to live the life taught by Jesus and Buddha. They were thoroughly practical in their advice. Dr. de Purucker refers to this in saying:

It is this desire for impersonal service which purifies the heart, clarifies the mind, and impersonalizes the knots of the lower selfhood, so that they open and thereby become capable of receiving wisdom. — *Golden Precepts of Esotericism*, p. 153

H. P. Blavatsky says:

Self-Knowledge is of loving deeds the child. — *The Voice of the Silence*

The true psychology that we all need is a process of self-discipline, and its practitioners are not necessarily qualified by university degrees, useful as these may be for other purposes.

While it may seem strange to some that the most precious knowledge we can attain should be obtainable only by impersonal living with the benefit of the human race always in view, it is perfectly reasonable because all knowledge is within the province of the inner god, whose law of being is love. It is the way the great Masters of wisdom and compassion have reached their goal; their purified personalities no longer obstruct the inner light. As the Oriental saying puts it: "The lamp and the wick are clean."

Who, then, are these sages and seers in reality?

The Masters of Wisdom, Compassion, and Peace

A few points should be given here in addition to what has already been said, for the ideal to which all true aspirants to a holy life should look cannot be too strongly emphasized. From what has gone before it is not difficult to understand that certain persons must have advanced far nearer than others to the realization of their inner godlike nature — a realization to which the whole human race is gradually moving in its evolution. Among the more advanced a very few have far outstripped even the best and most intelligent who move in ordinary society. These are the efflorescence of their age. They are known as saviors, world-teachers, sages, and more particularly to theosophists as mahatmas, initiates, or Masters of wisdom. History records such spiritually evolved human beings under the names of Gautama the Buddha, Jesus the Christ, Pythagoras, Krishna, Lao-Tse, and many others. They belonged to an association or brotherhood that has existed from

time immemorial, and which is still as active as ever. At intervals this brotherhood sends forth a messenger to reawaken the knowledge of the ancient wisdom about man and nature.

H. P. Blavatsky was one of these messengers, prepared by study and discipline to tell the Western world a little about the necessary qualifications to enter it. In her *Voice of the Silence* she describes the steep and thorny road leading to that peace and wisdom where a great reward is found — the power to help and serve humanity. The secret of success is "To live to benefit mankind is the first step. To practice the six glorious virtues is the second. . . . So shalt thou be in full accord with all that lives; bear love to men as though they were thy brother-pupils, disciples of one Teacher, the sons of one sweet mother."

The adepts who established the Theosophical Society take little part in the administration of its external affairs, and in no sense do they exercise control over the Fellows of the Society, but they are always in close touch with the messenger who represents them in the outer world.

The claim that such an association of guardians of humanity exists, unknown except to a few, is obviously a bold one; yet it is true, and why should it be surprising when we realize what evolution really implies? Why should we ordinary people be the highest that nature has been able to produce? She has had millions of years to do better, and even among known peoples and individuals there are enormous differences. The high adept is the rare efflorescence of a race, a forced development; but a type that will be as normal in future as the average decent person is today.

The Orient has always known of adepts, but in the West only the *original* Rosicrucians, the seventeenth-century Platonists, and a few mystical philosophers at various times, hinted at their existence until H. P. Blavatsky proclaimed them openly as her teachers and inspirers.

The adepts are the trustees and guardians of the sacred knowledge and in order to preserve it intact they cannot mix freely with the world, but must live in seclusion. Their work being largely on inner planes of thought and action, there would be no advantage, but many disadvantages, in publicity; they would be hindered at every point. They have no desire to prove their existence to a skeptical public.

But the path to wisdom opens to those who love humanity and sacrifice their personal desires, and who seek it for the pure motive of helping their brothers: they know the password; they know how to give the true knock. The great teachers are always seeking for those in whom they see a ray of the christ-light or buddhic splendor, and such will meet them in due course; how soon depends entirely on themselves. The *receiving of light* depends on the sincerity of the desire to pass its benefits on to others, and that is why nothing but love of one's neighbor as oneself — brotherhood — is the key to theosophy, and the first object of the Theosophical Society.

Some well-meaning persons say that we do not require outside helpers or teachers, because enlightenment comes from within. The light is indeed within, but have we found it? Why should we refuse a guide to the path which we desire to tread? According to theosophy, the real teacher (*guru* in Sanskrit) is not a learned professor who pours vast masses of information into the mind — a well-written book can do that; but rather is a *readjuster*, or literally a guide who points the way. We ourselves must tread it, we must do our own work. But even in the ordinary affairs of life the inexperienced need help before they can stand alone; how much more in an enterprise that will tax one's determination, courage, and moral strength to the utmost? It is right to repudiate any system that promises an easy way, a "royal road," but that is no reason to refuse the advice of those who have passed onward through that "strait gate" and along the "narrow way" "which leadeth unto life." They know the pitfalls in the path, and the right time to give help. H. P. Blavatsky herself said she never would have been able fully to awaken the invisible *I am* within herself without the direction of a Master. She makes this very clear in a letter published in *The Path*, Vol. 10, p. 367:

Yet I am enough of an occultist to know that before we find the Master within our own hearts and seventh principle — we need an outside Master.

And further:

My Master (the living one) . . . is a Saviour, he who leads you to finding the Master within

yourself.

Is it possible to get in touch with the Masters of wisdom? Yes, if the conditions are present. The first condition — insuperable to so many — is the motive. Is it curiosity, however laudable from an ordinary standpoint, or the sincere desire to lift yourself and the world spiritually, regardless of any selfish longings for *personal* gratification? Is the desire to help others greater than the desire to receive help?

If so, the Masters will meet you halfway, because they are always looking for recruits in the army of impersonal, devoted workers for human welfare. Become like them and they will naturally recognize you. As Dr. de Purucker says:

I repeat the words of all the great Seers and Sages of the ages: Knock, and if you give the right knock, it will be opened unto you. Ask, and if you ask aright, in self-forgetfulness and in sheer hunger for light, for truth, ye shall receive.

. . . self-forgetfulness is the knocking, the mystic knocking, at the door of the initiation-chamber of the temple. — *Questions We All Ask*

An important reference to this occurs in a letter from one of the Masters who established the Theosophical Society:

thought runs swifter than the electric fluid, and your thought will find me if projected by a pure impulse, as mine will find . . . your mind. . . Like the light in the sombre valley seen by the mountaineer from his peaks, every bright thought in your mind, my Brother, will sparkle and attract the attention of your distant friend and correspondent. If thus we discover our natural Allies in the *Shadow* world — your world and ours outside the precincts — and it is our law to approach every such an one if even there be but the feeblest glimmer of the true "Tathagata" light within him — then how far easier for you to attract us. — *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, pp. 267-8

Theosophy and Mythology

The study of mythology is important to theosophists, but our position differs from that of the regular schools in some respects. The latter assume that mankind, although a million or more years old, was quite barbarous until a few thousand years ago, and that even when high civilizations existed no discrimination was used and the most ridiculous stories were accepted without question. The belief in magic, in the myths of gods and heroes, in fairies or disembodied spirits of any kind, all were "folklore," curious and amusing from our pinnacle of scientific attainment. Stories of the creation of the universe and man, the deluge, of divine and semi-divine rulers and teachers, of golden ages, and the like, were invented by poets and dreamers to satisfy the questionings of the childhood of the race. Any rational basis for sun-, moon-, or star-worship is to be sought only in the effort to increase fertility. The gods are personifications of natural phenomena such as lightning, rain, or the dawn; fear is the basis of religion, and so forth.

To all this we disagree in principle, while admitting that there is a small proportion of fact in the folklore theory. Certain folk tales and myths are purely imaginative and most of the "magic" is jugglery — but by no means all. The more important cosmogonies, mythologies, and semi-historical legends of antiquity were the work of well-instructed teachers, initiates, who were allowed to present certain aspects of natural law in allegorical form. The fuller meaning of the allegories could be imparted only to those who were "duly and truly qualified."

In addition to a certain confusion deliberately created to conceal the deeper knowledge for which the "profane" or unprepared were not ready, utterly misleading corruptions crept in during the centuries. No wonder the modern scholar, with materialistic or theological bias, has little appreciation of the hidden meaning of the disfigured relics of the ancient wisdom, and is wandering on sidetracks that lead nowhere. Even the folklore, mythology, and ceremonials of various tribes, descendants of former high civilizations, can teach very little without the theosophic keys.

By using these keys, H. P. Blavatsky, in her great works, demonstrated that the story of the evolution of the cosmos, the world, and mankind, was contained in jumbled fashion within the mythologies, epics, and pseudo-historical legends of early peoples. The great religions as we have them are primarily concerned with the relation between "God" and man, in order to provide a system of worship and a code of morals; but in the allegories and historical traditions on which they rest the main teachings of theosophy are more or less plainly revealed — teachings such as reincarnation, the various human principles, the hierarchies of gods and other beings, and even the evolution of humanity through the rounds and races.

In the Mysteries back of the exoteric religions, the higher theosophical teachings were given to the deserving according to their spiritual standing. The widely-distributed legends of man-gods or divine heroes, such as the Buddha, Jesus, Krishna (under many personifications), Osiris-Horus, Hercules, Mithra, and many others, have a far deeper signification than the narratives indicate, although they are probably all founded on the lives of real personages. From one aspect the stories represent the training, trials, and ultimate glorious illumination of the successful candidate for the greater Mysteries, so far as this could be told without revealing what was unlawful.

The subject of the real basis of the mythologies is fully considered in theosophical literature, especially in *The Secret Doctrine*.

Theosophy and Religion

Someone has quaintly said, "Man is an incurably religious animal"; and in spite of occasional outbreaks of materialism, it is true enough. The feeling of reverence for something greater than the personal self is founded on the real presence of a divine central self, of which the personality is only a weak and distorted reflection. Theosophy is the universal "religion" that expresses this; it is the parent of the various great religions known to the world — aspects of truth that have had their rise, decline, and fall. It is known to students of theosophy as the wisdom-religion, the secret doctrine, the esoteric philosophy, *atma-vidya*, etc. It does not admit or worship an anthropomorphic God with limitations of personality — an autocratic ruler of the universe from which he is independent or separate. Its conception of the eternal is far more sublime than can be contained in even the loftiest idea of personality.

Among other early authorities of the Christian Church, St. Augustine recognized the antiquity and truth of the primitive wisdom-religion, theosophy. He says:

That in our times, is the Christian religion, which to know and follow is the most sure and certain health. But this name is not that of the thing itself; for the thing which is now called the Christian religion really was known to the ancients, nor was wanting at any time from the beginning of the human race until the time when Christ came in the flesh, from whence the true religion, which had previously existed, began to be called Christian. — *Retractationes*, i, xiii

Certain fundamental teachings common to Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Mithraism, Taoism, the Egyptian, Greek and Roman religions, etc., reveal the presence of the ancient wisdom-religion, and, of course, it was more explicitly taught in the schools of the Mysteries of antiquity. The cruel persecutions that have disgraced certain historical periods could not have happened if the devotees had recognized the kernel of truth within the outer shell of the various warring creeds.

We must not, then, fall into the error of regarding theosophy as an artificial system compounded from carefully selected portions of the world-faiths. Theosophy is the original basis, formulated from the experiences of giant intelligences, initiated Seers who have penetrated deep beneath the outward veil of illusion that hides the realities from our gaze, who have traveled into the mystical arcana of the invisible worlds. Unfortunately, through the weakness and selfishness of human nature, the revelations of the sages gradually became obscured by dogmas and gross superstitions. Intolerant sectarianism dominated in most countries, especially in the Western world, until lately, when the spread of scientific research and learning exposed the fallacy of many time-honored creeds, but unhappily without replacing them by a satisfactory substitute. The need for a new presentation of the ancient philosophy was never greater than today.

The teachings of theosophy would find little response if they were not imbedded in the inner spiritual man; but as they are really only a formulation of what exists therein, it is not surprising that they appear familiar to many on a first hearing.

Theosophy, as already said, has always had its guardians and preservers, and from time to time messengers have been sent out from the permanent center of wisdom to revive its teachings in various parts of the world.

In this way the great religions arose, pure and strong at first. They were not formed by growth from inferior superstitions but were definite revelations. As they increase in age they degenerate, and a new messenger from the original source has to re-state the neglected ethical teachings and as much as conditions will permit of the nature of man and the universe. At times the efforts of the great teachers were directed toward founding schools of philosophy, such as those of Pythagoras or Plato, Confucius or Lao-Tse, or the Indian systems. The inspiring influence of these is a matter of admitted history.

In regard to theosophy and religions we may consider the Christian faith as an illustration of the work of the messengers. As St. Augustine rightly said, Christianity was not a new revelation, but a rebirth of the old wisdom-religion that had always existed; truth cannot contradict itself. The divine afflatus, or spirit of illumination, came down through Jesus the Christ to proclaim anew and quicken in the West the understanding of the old, old story. While he was a son of God in a special sense — an avatara, to use a Sanskrit term (1) — he emphatically taught that all men are sons of God, — even more, "ye are gods" — and that "greater works shall ye do." Mankind sorely needed and still needs to be reminded of its inner divinity, obscured by "the flesh."

The divinity of man is the primary teaching of all the messengers of the great spiritual Lodge; evolution cannot advance to its sublime destiny till that is learned. Jesus showed the way of attainment, the only path. He taught no creed, he established no form of worship. He repeated the golden rule of the ages: love, brotherhood, forgiveness, self-forgetfulness.

But, alas, it was not long before his teaching was obscured and a formal religion instituted, with compulsory articles of faith, ceremonial rituals, and a politico-clerical organization. The Roman Emperors adopted it and made it an engine of statecraft. The vital impulse of its original teachings preserved it through the centuries, but its spiritual power was terribly weakened by deadletter controversies and the dissensions of dogmatic sects, as well as by the horrible persecutions and religious wars that have disgraced its history so often. The spiritual influence of the few real Western mystics, illumined by a large measure of self-knowledge, such as Dionysius the Areopagite, Eckhart, Boehme, Henry More, etc., runs like a silver thread on the dark background. Their simple teachings of soul wisdom, though suspect and unpopular, redeem the whole era from being entirely barren.

With other religions it was largely the same. Starting with the simple truths brought by some inspired messenger, they degenerated into formalism and superstition, even if not always into persecution and bloodshed. The essential object — to awaken individual to the knowledge of their own inner divinity — was pushed aside, when not entirely ignored.

Theosophy in the Bible

As the Hebrew scriptures are more familiar and accessible to Occidentals than the other sacred books of the East, we shall close by pointing out a few of the theosophical teachings therein, generally ignored — perhaps unconsciously — by theologians, but which provide an example of the existence of theosophy in all the world scriptures.

The divinity of man in his real inner nature is plainly taught in the New Testament, and yet this magnificent concept, the greatest possible appeal to noble living and happiness for all mankind, has been thrust into the background, and the lower nature, the mere personality, has been treated as the real person. Western humanity has been taught that it was "born in sin" and required an external redeemer. Theosophy is bringing back the majestic teaching of real Christianity — "Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High" (Psalms

82:6), quoted approvingly by Jesus when defending himself against the Jews (*John* 10:34).

Many passages in the Bible teach the doctrine of karma. In Galatians (6:7), Paul expressly says "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." As for reincarnation, denied or ignored by the Churches, it was the general belief of antiquity as it is today in the Orient, and so we need not be surprised to find it referred to as a recognized doctrine, as in Revelation 3:12, and elsewhere.

Certain parts of the Bible present the evolution of nature and man under allegories that are transparent enough to the student of mythologies who has the assistance of theosophy. For instance, take the two well-known stories of creation in Genesis which are so contradictory that modern criticism, even in the churches, disregards them as serious contributions to knowledge. They are supposed to be poetical effusions, guesses at truth by simple souls; and bound together, without regard to any plan or connection, by the compiler.

But if we apply the theosophical key, we find a very different explanation. The two stories are not contradictory nor are they childish folklore. Each represents a different period of evolution. The Adam of the first narrative is not the Adam of the second. The earlier account gives a highly condensed version of the first three rounds or terrestrial cycles, and part of the fourth one, until the intellect, manas, began to function in its third root-race, and the separation of the sexes took place. The mental torpor of the early races, previous to the awakening of the mind, is symbolized by the deep sleep of Adam mentioned in the second chapter of Genesis; and the separation of the sexes by the creation of Eve from his rib. The Garden of Eden, the Trees of Life and Knowledge, the temptation by the Serpent, etc., are simply allegorical statements of the facts of evolution, found in various guises in other ancient teachings.

Before concluding it is desirable to repeat that theosophy is not made up of bits of ancient religions and philosophies blended artfully with modern evolutionary ideas — a fabricated concoction. Theosophy is the formulation of the wisdom of great seers and sages who penetrated ages ago behind the veil of nature, spiritual, psychical, and physical. Partial revelations have been made from time to time and in various ways, but the full understanding has been always reserved for the few, as was demanded by the nature of the case.

The Secret Doctrine is the accumulated Wisdom of the Ages . . . 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. — *The Secret Doctrine*, 1, 272

In preparation for the new cycle now dawning, H. P. Blavatsky was commissioned to speak of this more openly, to bring the knowledge of the existence of Masters to the West, and to reveal keys to knowledge that had not been given out before. For those who have the spiritual welfare of humanity at heart those keys are indispensable.

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FOOTNOTE:

1. "It means the descent of a divine being, not into human flesh, but as it were *towards* incarnation in human flesh. It means the overshadowing, or more correctly speaking the over-illuminating, of some great and noble man by a divinity, by a god. . . .

"Jesus was an avatara, a manifestation through the form of a human being, of a god, of a divinity - one of the spiritual beings controlling our part of the stellar universe." — G. de Purucker: *The Story of Jesus* ([return to text](#))