

The Key to Theosophy I

The Key to Theosophy was written by H.P. Blavatsky towards the end of her life, one of her two final books, the other being *The Voice of the Silence*. *The Key to Theosophy* is, she writes, “Only a key to unlock the door that leads to deeper study,” viz., *The Secret Doctrine*. It is said to be “A CLEAR EPOSITION, IN THE FORM OF QUESTION AND ANSWER, OF THE ETHICS, SCIENCE, AND PHILOSOPHY. For The Study of Which The Theosophical Society Has Been Founded,” and is “Dedicated By ‘H.P.B.’ To all her Pupils, that They may Learn and Teach in their turn.”

This essay and one to follow will exposit several of the fundamental ideas to be found in this text.

Theosophy is not a religion, but is, rather, “Divine Knowledge or Science.” Divine Wisdom, the Wisdom of the gods comes from the Greek *Theosophia*, *Sophia* meaning lovers of Truth. This name derives from the third century A.D. It pertains to the inculcation of “certain great moral truths upon its disciples and all those who were lovers of the truth,” hence the motto adopted by the Theosophical Society “there is no religion higher than truth.”

The WISDOM-RELIGION “was ever one,” and has been preserved through countless ages by Initiates and their disciples, where such teachings were carefully preserved, primarily in India, Central Asia and Persia [Iran]. It has ever consisted of exoteric (public) and esoteric (hidden) teachings, the “greater” (secret) and the “lesser” (public) Mysteries. The former have been, in all such traditions, not allocated to the many, to whom were “allocated only the husks.” This distinction is implied in the words of Jesus, “cast not your pearls before swine, lest they turn and rend you.” Entrance into the greater Mysteries has ever been based upon certain strict qualifications, entailing the taking of pledges to one’s Higher Self, “for life, and for lives” with the intent of “becoming the better able to help and teach others.” The infinite cannot be known by the finite, it must be “communicated to the Higher Spiritual Self in a state of ecstasy.” This knowledge, brought to the West by Pythagoras and Plato, was obscured in the third century A.D., and forbidden. Yet, it was carried on intact, by various secret societies and groups until, in the fourteenth century A.D., it was once again brought to the West as a

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result of a *determination* by Tsong-Khapa, an enlightened Sage in Tibet. It was, after many centuries, spread-broadcast, publicly, through the writings and teachings of H.P. Blatvatsky, who wrote, in the nineteenth century that she was “preparing the way for one far greater than myself.”

The Theosophical Society was founded in 1875 with three Objects: the formation of a nucleus of Universal Brotherhood, the translation and study of the sacred teachings of mankind, and the study of the hidden forces in Nature and in Man. In 1888, H.P. B. established an *Esoteric Section*, entry into which, as in ages before, required taking seven Pledges to one’s Higher Self, the result of which is as “he who enters is as one newly born.” The Pledges taken include a solemn oath that the teachings imparted are never to be used for selfish purposes and are not to be revealed, “except by permission.” William Q. Judge writes, “*a pledge once taken, is forever binding in both the moral and the occult worlds. If we break it once and are punished, that does not justify us in breaking it again, and so long as we do so, so long will the mighty lever of the Law (of Karma) react upon us.*” (*The Path*, July, 1889)

The Universe as we know it is the result of a highly metaphysical process of emanation, not creation, as typically understood. It is a reflection of the one universal and eternal *reality* casting a periodic reflection of *itself* “on the infinite Spatial depths.” This reflection is taught to be “a temporary illusion, and nothing else.” Only that which is eternal, boundless, unknowable is *real*. As written in the Gospel according to John, “...and (Absolute) light (which is darkness) shineth in the darkness (which illusory material light) and the darkness comprehendeth it not.” This process of emanation moves from homogeneous subjectivity, through seven planes, at each becoming denser and material, until reaching what we know as the material universe and all contained therein. These seven planes consist of three higher, eternal, corresponding to man’s Higher Self and four lower, corresponding to the aspects of man’s mortal, temporal self. The Path consists, in part, in the process of irradiating the latter the former and, from another perspective, seeking and ever greater realization of the Higher Self.

The mind, *Manas*, is a dual principle, consisting of spiritual consciousness, *Manas* illuminated by *Buddhi* (Spiritual Intuition) which subjectively perceives

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impersonal, abstract ideas and of the lower *Manasic* light, one with the physical brain and senses, thus mortal. Higher Manas, on the other hand, is ever radiant, eternal, knowing no death, whereas the lower personal mind is mutable, mortal, existing in the realm of evanescent illusions. Thus, the nature of the spiritual quest consists in coming to increasingly dwell upon the three higher aspects of man through purifying and making more porous the lower mind while, at the same time, rising, through meditation, to a rapport with the Higher Self. Every noble thought, every aspiration of the personal man, which proceeds from the higher, becomes a permanent aspect of the incarnated self. The purely personal consciousness must, however, disappear during the process of death, which affects only the lower, ever changing principles of man. The bridge (*Antaskarana*) between the lower and the Higher must be consciously developed, then crossed. This development is a function of meditation; combined with one's efforts to live in line with universal, abstract ideas, moving gradually from theory to practice. The Higher Self is "our Father in Secret." The eyes of mankind have become obscured by illusions, thus we are but poor pilgrims who must, "through self-induced and self-devised efforts," regain that which we have lost.

The Higher Triad of man consists of *Atma*, universal, eternal Absolute Light, symbolized by the apex of an upward pointing triangle; of *Buddhi*, the vehicle of *Atma*; and *Manas*, "the Thinking Principle." This Triad is the essential man, changeless and eternal. It is that which projects itself into earthly incarnations, under the Law of Karma, Justice and Harmony until that point is reached wherein incarnation becomes a conscious choice as in the case of *Bodhisattvas* who incarnate as the result of a vow to lead all beings to Enlightenment. This is the Path of Renunciation, foregoing eternal rest and bliss for one's self in order to sacrificially aid humanity struggling in ignorance and darkness. Entrance upon this Path is intimated, for example, in The Bodhisattva Vow, the Pledge of Kwan-Yin and the Shanti-Deva Ordination. This is reflected, too, in the Pledges taken upon entrance to any true Esoteric School, ancient or modern.

Atma is the "*Higher Self*," and, like the sunlight, shines upon all, a universally diffused "*divine principle*," inseparable from ever unknowable Absolute, "as the sunbeam is inseparable from sunlight." *Buddhi* is its vehicle and neither separately nor

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together are of any use to man “*unless the divine Duad is assimilated by, and reflected in, some consciousness.*” This consciousness is *Manas*, the product, in a reflected form of *Ahankara*, “the I-making faculty,” the “I AM I” consciousness, impersonal, eternal. When this latter is inseparably united to *Atma-Buddhi*, it is referred to as the SPIRITUAL EGO, the radiant. It is this Ego which over-broods every personality into which Karma forces it to incarnate and which is held responsible for all misdeeds committed by that personality, the mask which obscures the true Individual through a long series of lives until that point is reached wherein arises a strong desire to transcend the realms of illusion, to move towards true spiritual awareness. This desire is nurtured through beneficent motive, firm resolve and continuity of meditation. It is fructified by an unswerving devotion to true Teachers, to one’s chosen Guru, whether incarnate or not. It matters little, as all such beings are neither born nor do they pass away. They are eternal, ever accessible sources and forces of Light, Wisdom and Compassion. Devotion is the fulcrum upon which pivot the treading of the student who enters the Path.

Theosophia teaches the immutable Law of Love, Justice and Mercy. No man who has transgressed the Law of Karma in previous incarnations is to be, with any degree of justice, responsible for the consequences of his birth, does not ask to be born, cannot choose his parents and is the victim of environment and circumstances over which he has no control. It is taught that were his transgressions to be impartially investigated, he would, “in nine cases out of ten,” be found to be the one sinned against, rather than the sinner. Life is a stormy sea to cross, a burden, often too difficult to bear. Only the Sages of the East have found the key to it. As Shakespeare writes: “Life is but a walking shadow—a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

As Buddha taught in his First Noble Truth, “There is suffering: birth, sickness, old age, decrepitude and death.” The cause of this suffering is *Tanha*, clinging, grasping after the illusory, the evanescent, and the unreal; drowning in the sea of material existence. In most cases, this suffering must become sufficiently intense that one wishes for more, for the real. One must seek the cause of this turmoil, this suffering, the result of clinging. Thus one comes to realize that *Tanha* must be overcome. From the standpoint

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of *Theosophia*, the only appropriate motive for such an undertaking is the service of humanity as a whole. This motive is not a mere conceptual construct, an impression in the mind, but consists of a deepening desire within the heart, which, if sustained, will alchemically transform the dross within into the gold of Spiritual Intuition. Thus, one has, in one manner or another, entered the Path. The Noble Eight-Fold Path, as taught by Buddha can, from an esoteric standpoint, be seen as the necessary precursor to the sacred, secret Teachings revealed in the Greater Mysteries, to which H.P.B. broadened access in the nineteenth century.

That which is central to her teachings is to be found in the last two sections of *The Key to Theosophy*, which speak of “THE THEOSOPHICAL MAHATMAS.” Masters of Wisdom, Rishis, Sages, as They have also been identified. The word *Mahatma*, rendered literally, means “Great Soul,” a being who has mastered the arcane Wisdom-Compassion of the One, fully realized tenants of *Theosophia*. From Them are said to have come all the world’s Great Teachings, most recently those to be found in *The Secret Doctrine* by H.P.B. who states in the first sentence of its Preface, “The author, the writer, rather...” indicating thereby that the two-volume work was authored by the *Mahatmas* of whom she was an advanced Disciple. These great beings, Initiates, leading lives of pure holiness, “are not aesthetics in the ordinary sense,” though they for the most part remain apart from the world’s turmoil and are said to live “in the Trans-Himalayan regions.” Their *accepted Chelas* (Disciples) have trained and transmuted themselves to a sufficient degree as to be *en-rapport* with Them, “minds sympathetically related, and the instruments through they function are tuned to respond magnetically and electrically to one another. There is nothing which will prevent the transmission of thoughts from one to the other, at will; for since the mind is not of a tangible nature, that distance can divide it from the subject of its contemplation, it follows that the only difference that can exist between two minds is a difference of STATE. So, if this latter hindrance is overcome, where is the *miracle of thought-transference*, at whatever distance?”

The *Mahatmas* never, unlike “the Brothers of the Shadow,” never attempt to gain full mastery over an immortal Ego and can; therefore, only act upon the physical and psychic nature of a person, leaving free-will totally intact. Thus, unless a person has

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been, through his own efforts, brought into “a psychic relationship with the Masters, and is assisted by virtue of his full faith in, and devotion to, his Teachers,” the transmission of Their thoughts will be unable to penetrate their cloudy sphere. Thus, the great stress put upon the need for purification of the lower four principles in man, the making more *porous* mind and heart. There needs be meditation, coupled with honest self-study, self-examination and self-correction. This requires great courage, devotion and the gradual release of the impersonal Spiritual Will, gradually displacing the merely personal separative will. It is taught, “The only *sin* in occultism is *the Great Dire Heresy of Separateness*.” As a pilgrim begins to build the *Antaskarana Bridge*, moving upward and downward across it, as in the Divine Dialectic, the sense of being a person separate from others gradually diminishes, gradually opens into an experience of Oneness, which is, paradoxically, not known as such.

Without *Mahatmas* (to use one term of many), there can be no Teachings. Without Teachings, there can be no Path. Without a Path, there can be no Pilgrims. Without Pilgrims, there can be not hope. The existence of “galaxies of Perfected Beings” is the foundation of Light, Love and Hope for all Mankind.