

# THEOSOPHY

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## THE WORK OF STUDY

THE philosophy of Theosophy imposes unusual obligations upon its students, for the study of Theosophy is a science in itself. It is not study in the sense of an exploration of the thoughts and opinions, the conclusions or reasoning, of other men. To study Theosophy in a way that brings comprehension is to step outside oneself in order to look within.

The teachers of Theosophy have always discouraged the notion that its doctrines need simply to be added to ideas already held. They have warned instead that the theosophist must abandon the trodden routines of thought, and that to the "satisfied"—to the mentally lazy or obtuse—Theosophy must remain a riddle. On this statement itself, as on any theosophical explanation, the principle of theosophical study may be practised—if the student is determined to know the nature of *man*, instead of merely accumulating information, or storing away ethical codes by which others may be judged. The statement can be seen to imply that if and when Theosophy presents riddles to one's understanding, the mental condition of the puzzler is to be held responsible, and that every theosophical doctrine *may* begin as a riddle for the student.

Stepping outside oneself in order to look within need not be regarded as an unnatural operation, nor as a hazardous withdrawal from the only reality we are sure of. The self we can step out of cannot be our true being, for with the Self there is neither going nor returning—only existence. The Self governs the apprehension of truth. The soul looks directly upon ideas, but such is the refraction introduced by the medium of the other self, or the not-self, that the mind does not focus on realities. The power to focus on the real in all things and beings is the only power "conferred" by Theosophy: "the right perception of existing things, the knowledge of the nonexistent." Study of Theosophy, therefore, is the exercise of discernment and discrimination, rather than the accumulation of mental luggage, no matter how attractively packaged or

compactly arranged. It means assuming the position that there *is* a theosophy or knowledge, and studying all else from that point of view. Only thus can Theosophy be verified by the individual. When the methods of ordinary study are applied to Theosophy, the common effect is either intellectual excitement that, soon or late, is surfeited and expires; or intellectual rebellion at vaulting hypotheses, “metaphysical” assertions, and at an unparalleled audacity in realms which—whether held sacred or suppositional—are usually not a subject for *study*.

If Theosophy were presented as a revelation, it would find ready acceptance in several quarters. This is no conjecture, but a fact from history: when the Messianic urge takes hold of one in the theosophical ranks, “theosophy” emerges as a religion and flourishes like the green bay tree, drawing into its conformable shade a host of relaxed minds and uncritical believers. As the years go by, the religion becomes increasingly conventional, finally taking its place beside other opiates of the mind. But Theosophy itself can hardly be confused with such comfortable doctrines, for Theosophy is always a disturbing philosophy. No matter how much a man may know of life and being, he cannot take up the *study* of Theosophy without arriving at the disturbing realization that there is more—and more—to be understood. But, again, it will be the not-self which suffers this disturbance, because inertia is its nature and fixity its goal. The ever-striving soul must be constantly cutting away its personal moorings in order that its voyage may continue. None but ourselves can weigh anchor for us, and this is the real reason why Theosophy is not, nor ever was, “revealed” to anyone. Not the clearest intellect nor the warmest humanitarianism will enable one to open the theosophical view before the eyes of another. *Seeing* an idea is an intensely individual matter, a form of growth which proceeds in its own cycle, and is but slightly modified by the pressure of outside circumstances or other beings. As one theosophical educator has written:

We cannot be told truths which do not already potentially exist in ourselves. We may hear them but they pass by and leave no trace. This is what Jesus meant when he said: “To him that hath shall be given”; and in the Hermetic philosophy it is plainly stated:

“Do not think that I tell you what you know not; I only tell what you knew before.”

The complement of this passage, which otherwise might stand as warrant for an attempt to pursue knowledge by and for oneself, is that we see ourselves more clearly in the light of a common brotherhood. “The important thing is to develop the self in the Self, and then the possessions of wisdom belonging to all wise men at once belong to us.” Brotherhood is itself a form of wisdom, and it is the *brotherhood* of the wise that most attests their wisdom. This is perhaps the reason why H. P. Blavatsky claimed no unique knowledge, but referred to a company of teachers who shared with her the truths they had mastered together. In the preface to *The Secret Doctrine* she wrote: “this work is a partial statement of what (the author) herself has been taught by more advanced students, supplemented, in a few details only, by the results of her own study and observation.”

The *Secret Doctrine* Preface is an extremely selective document, for in it H.P.B. delineates, point by point, the only type of mind which can be expected to see Theosophy steadily, and “see it whole.” First, she declines to apologize for deficiencies of style or language, thus eliminating that segment of the non-discriminating public for whom the style is the man, the idea and the truth. The philosophical mind is prepared for inadequacies of language; it does not look to words alone for illumination. Words are as a swaying bridge over which one must precariously make his way: only vision fixed on the “other side” can steady and secure his passage. There are some who consider that they have learned from *The Secret Doctrine*, and others who find in it nothing at all. Both are sincere in their declarations, except that the first have managed to *cross* the bridge.

H.P.B. further remarks that her “sole advantage” is that she “need not resort to personal speculations and theories.” How many of her readers join her in considering that qualification an advantage? How many automatically prefer their own speculations however peculiar and unsupportable by reason and law—to anything the *S.D.* may have to offer? This is any man’s privilege, but it also constitutes his refusal to accept H.P.B.’s invitation—the challenge of every theosophical teacher and of Theosophy itself—to take up the discipline of

study. Theosophy is not contained in a set of books or ideas. It is a body of principles built of the soul's experience and emancipation. Study of Theosophy, therefore, can in a very real sense be called the work of the soul, and that evolution partakes of no special gifts or privileges: authority, revelation and demonstration are in *the man himself*, to be developed only by self-induced and self-devised efforts. In the unity of study and work is the key to Theosophy.

#### “AN INTEGRAL CYCLE”

The *Secret Doctrine* asserts that a system, known as the **WISDOM RELIGION**, the work of generations of adepts and seers, the sacred heirloom of pre-historic times—actually exists, though hitherto preserved in the greatest secrecy by the present Initiates; and it points to various corroborations of its existence to this very day, to be found in ancient and modern works. Giving a few fragments only, it there shows how these explain the religious dogmas of the present day, and how they might serve Western religions, philosophies and science, as sign-posts along the untrodden paths of discovery. It is also maintained that its doctrines and sciences, which form an integral cycle of universal cosmic facts and metaphysical axioms and truths, represent a complete and unbroken system; and that he who is brave and persevering enough, ready to crush the *animal* in himself, and forgetting the human *self*, sacrifices it to his Higher Ego, can always find his way to become initiated into these mysteries. This is all the *Secret Doctrine* claims. —H.P.B.