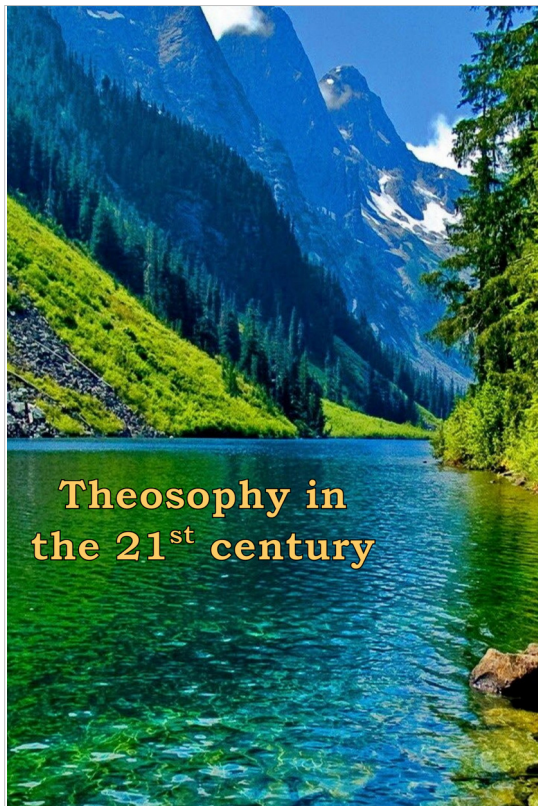




**Theosophy in
the 21st century**

2 Fundamental Ideas of Theosophy

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2018

What are the sources of Theosophy?

- The true source is the very essence of each one of us.
- Those who have somehow experienced an achievement of Perennial Wisdom, have left us a body of teachings which we also often call "Theosophy."
- Remember: A travel guide about Vienna is not the same as visiting Vienna.



School of Athens (Rafael)

SOURCES OF THEOSOPHY

When we intend to study a body of teachings we need to know what is its origin, what are its sources. In the case of Theosophy, which is the Divine Wisdom, we must remember that its only true source is the essence of our Being, the essence of each one of us.

However there is a tradition or a set of teachings that have existed since ancient times which are also known by the name of Theosophy. This body of teachings is also called **Ancient Wisdom or Perennial Wisdom** because in almost every epoch and culture there have been notable people who have understood, proclaimed, and taught their principles, even though they differed from those commonly accepted.

But we must be cautious and remember that a travel guide of the city of Vienna is not the same as the experience of visiting it. Nothing replaces first hand experience and knowledge of teaching is not the same as living and experiencing Reality first hand. Let's briefly mention some of these sources.

THEOSOPHIST. The WISDOM-RELIGION was ever one, and being the last word of possible human knowledge, was, therefore, carefully preserved. It preceded by long ages the Alexandrian Theosophists, reached the modern, and will survive every other religion and philosophy.

ENQUIRER. Where and by whom was it so preserved?

THEOSOPHIST. Among Initiates of every country; among profound seekers after truth—their disciples; and in those parts of the world where such topics have always been most valued and pursued: in India, Central Asia, and Persia.

Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*

Religions and initiatic traditions

- Religions have two aspects:
 - **Exoteric**: Scriptures, dogma, priests, rituals, for the general public.
 - **Esoteric**: Symbols, myths, only for seekers.
- Initiatic traditions: fundamental part of the ancient Schools of Mysteries
- **Initiation** = beginning of a new life
 - New understanding
 - New consciousness



We can trace the ideas of Theosophy in the teachings of the great religions of antiquity, especially when viewed in the light of less dogmatic and deeper interpretations. Ancient religions have had an **exoteric** or external aspect, dedicated to the general public, composed of scriptures, canons, precepts, worship, rituals and in general monks or priests who act as preceptors or intermediaries. But there was also an **esoteric** or internal aspect dedicated to restless, thinking people, interested in obtaining a teaching that goes beyond the shell of the external. In this esoteric aspect, religious writings in general are considered not as literal assertions but as a series of symbols, myths and legends that the student must interpret to find their meaning. There are many indications in the history of religions of such groups, some of whom were persecuted and condemned by orthodoxy.

We have the point of considering the ancient religions, because modern religions have been proclaimed in many cases that do not have original content but are based on other religions with previous approaches or interpretations given by some leader.

In the ancient world especially, in places of the Mediterranean such as Egypt, Greece, Asia Minor and others, groups emerged that although they had characteristics in common with the religions, like the rites, had the purpose to serve like true schools of the human nature and of Its transformation. Its purpose was the development of the human being, helping him in his transition from a life of ignorance and misery to a life full of understanding and happiness.

The **Mystery Schools** were very popular organizations which, by using symbolism, taught the mysteries of life, providing their followers with a teaching that was kept secret, safeguarded by the curious, since the candidates had to engage with that teaching rather than being a mere information. The most famous Mystery Schools were those of Isis, Orpheus, Eleusis, Mitra, Samothrace, and others.

A concept that became firm in the Mysteries is that of **Initiation**, which is the process by which the aspirant produces a change in his consciousness by initiating a new life, with a deeper understanding of things and a wider consciousness that allows the candidate to work for the progress of his life and live in harmony with the world.

Great thinkers of the ancient world

▪ Notable philosophers who were nourished by the initiatic tradition:

- Presocratics: Pythagoras, ...
- Plato
- Alexandrians: Ammonius Saccas, Plotinus, Iamblichus
- Spinoza

▪ Mystical and philosophical traditions:

- Hermetism
- Alchemy
- Kabbalah

▪ Free thinkers

- Giordano Bruno
- Paracelsus
- ...



Ageless Wisdom also flourished among the classical philosophers, from some pre-Socratic such as Tales, Anaximander, Pythagoras, or Parmenides, who were interested in explaining nature and the Universe. The most notable of these was Pythagoras (-582 to -507) who maintained that the Universe is mathematical and that it is a unit. He traveled through Mesopotamia and Egypt where he is believed to have been in contact with sages and from whom he learned some of his ideas. Pythagoras coined the term *philosophy* to designate the pursuit of wisdom, and his Pythagorean school was a appreciated training center for human development.

Later, among the classical philosophers, we can highlight Plato (-427 to -347), the founder of the Academy of Athens, whose ideas about the intelligible world, the apparent world, the role of good and evil were probably inspired by his travels through Egypt and Sicily.

The light that Plato threw on the world extended to the future, and although his ideas were questioned during a period, it was in Alexandria, Egypt, where they were rescued and amalgamated with those of Pythagoras and the Eastern tradition by the philosophers known as Neoplatonist, noticeably Ammonius Saccas and its successors like Plotinus, Iamblicus and others. They were who founded the *School of Alexandria* and called this knowledge **Theosophy**.

The Middle Ages in Europe were a difficult age for free thought and philosophy. Culture and the world of ideas in general were restricted by Christianity, the religion that had become so powerful as to decide who should reign and mark the fate of people. At that time, there arose thinkers who dared to challenge the power of the Church and surrounded their ideas of symbols and metaphors to be relatively unnoticed in the eyes of ecclesiastical power. Such was the case with the alchemists, who expressed through the metaphor of chemical transmutations the process of human transformation.

The Renaissance was produced by the resurgence of ancient traditions and the more humane and less theological approach to science and the arts. Great geniuses like Leonardo Vinci and Giordano Bruno gives they stood out rescuing the transcendent dimension of the mystery of the Life.. There were also secret and esoteric societies which, to a greater or lesser degree, recognized the tradition of the Ageless Wisdom and propagated it among their followers.

Modern presentations

- H. P. Blavatsky originated a stream of thinkers that still continues
- Theosophical Society writers:
 - Sinnet, Besant, Judge, Leadbeater, Van der Leeuw, Jinarajadasa, Sri Ram, Rohit Mehta, Taimni, Barborka, Radha Burnier, ...
- Writers outside of the TS:
 - Krishnamurti, Sri Aurobindo, Frijot Capra, Eckhart Tolle, Dalai Lama ...



Helena P. Blavatsky

In modern times the Theosophy was rediscovered for the Western world by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. She was a vigorous thinker and writer, a tireless traveler, dared to go to unconventional places for a woman in her day, such as Egypt, the Middle East, India, and even Tibet. In his travels he contacted notable beings who inspired her to found the Theosophical Society. HPB set out to travel, to write some fundamental works, and to write articles in various magazines that were of interest to the seekers of esotericism. It is due to she the presentation of Theosophy in the modern world, not as a new invention, but as the synthesis of science, philosophy and religion. It is due to she the rediscovery of the value of the ancient symbols and traditions, of the philosophies of the East, despised for many years as mere superstitions. The influence of HPB and Theosophy is not limited to the Theosophical Society, since it has been the inspiration of many artists, thinkers, and in general of the spiritual movements known vaguely as *New Age*, that announces a life of hope and lighting for the human being. She herself expressed that she presented this tradition without ages, in the following words:

But to the public in general and the readers of the "Secret Doctrine" I may repeat what I have stated all along, and which I now clothe in the words of Montaigne: Gentlemen,

*"I have here made only a nosegay of culled flowers,
and have brought nothing of my own but the string that ties them."*

Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. 1

At the end of the 19th century, in the 20th century and in the 21st century, an innumerable number of thinkers and writers who, using or not using the term Theosophy, have presented their particular vision of life coincident with the fundamental ideas of Perennial Wisdom. There are traditional authors within the Theosophical Society but also many authors who are not related to it and who nevertheless express the living essence of Theosophy and with which we can inspire. It is the student's personal task to discern where the authentic fragrance of Divine Wisdom lies and where it is simply sensationalism, superstition, or a repetition of information.

Statement of fundamental principles

- Presenting the essentials is not easy:
 - They are universal principles
 - They are therefore closer
 - They provide the necessary vision
- There are many presentations of traditional and modern writers.
- We chose the presentation of H. P. Blavatsky in the Proem of "*The Secret Doctrine*" for its universality and simplicity.



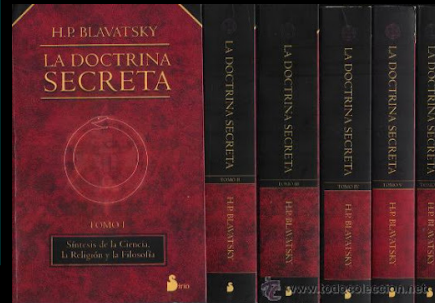
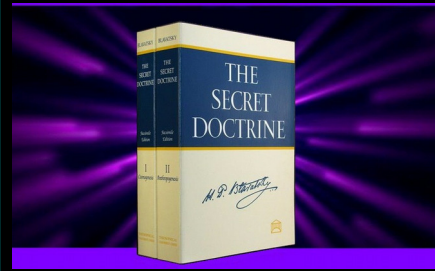
To approach the postulates of Theosophy, we must identify its fundamental principles, which are not precisely the easiest to understand because they are the most abstract. But without understanding these fundamentals the other propositions are deprived of their deeper meaning. The fundamental principles provide the necessary vision if we want to understand the propositions of Theosophy and its consequences in practical life. Our understanding of the essential principles will become deeper over time if we are true investigators and try to find them in our own inner source.

The essential principles form the foundation of the Ancient Wisdom or **Brahma Vidya** (the wisdom of Brahma, in Sanskrit), as it is known in India. Although they are abstract and transcendent principles, they are close, they concern us totally, so it is very important to try to understand them in the first place before examining other ideas. It is not an intellectual speculation but some propositions that try to explain the foundations of Life.

There are several presentations of the fundamental ideas of Theosophy. In this course we will start from the one exposed by Blavatsky in the Proem of *The Secret Doctrine* because it has the beauty of simplicity and the power of universality.

The Secret Doctrine

- Masterpiece of HPB
 - Volume 1 published in 1888
 - Based on the **Book of Dzyan**
- It was regarded as an “epitome of the Occult Wisdom”. ***It's not a revelation.***
- Part 1: Cosmogenesis
Part 2: Anthropogenesis
Part 3: Based on notes of HPB, published after her dead by Annie Besant
- Each part contains:
 - Stanzas of Book of Dzyan with commentaries
 - Simbology
 - Comparison with the Science of the epoch



The Secret Doctrine was originally intended as a profound revision of Isis Unveiled. However, seeing the magnitude of the changes that were necessary, HPB set out to create a new and great work, an endeavour much more difficult, but more structured and polished.

Its first editions consisted of 2 volumes. The first dedicated to Cosmogenesis and the second to Anthropogenesis. After the death of HPB, Annie Besant and a group of collaborators gathered and organized HPB notes that were published in a third volume. In many editions in Spanish these 3 parts have been divided into 6 volumes to make them more manageable.

The **Proem** is an initial part of the work where the author justifies the existence of a knowledge such as Theosophy and presents principles necessary to understand the topics that will be developed in the book. In the HPB Proem, it states **three propositions** that we will study later. She justifies the need to understand them first of all in the following way:

Before the reader proceeds to the consideration of the Stanzas from the Book of Dzyan which form the basis of the present work, it is absolutely necessary that he should be made acquainted with the few fundamental conceptions which underlie and pervade the entire system of thought to which his attention is invited. These basic ideas are few in number, and on their clear apprehension depends the understanding of all that follows; therefore no apology is required for asking the reader to make himself familiar with them first, before entering on the perusal of the work itself.

The Secret Doctrine establishes three fundamental propositions:

...

1st Proposition

I. An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable PRINCIPLE on which all speculation is impossible, since it transcends the power of human conception and could only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude. It is beyond the range and reach of thought — in the words of Mandukya, "unthinkable and unspeakable."



The first proposition speaks of the Universal Principle as the “infinite and eternal Cause, ... the root without root of all that was, is or will be”.

It is “Be-ness” rather than Being (in Sanskrit, Sat), and is beyond all thought or speculation.

The Universe as a whole is a manifestation of this Root. Notice that the Be-ness is not a being in itself but the essence or nature of Being in the abstract.

One aspect of this proposition is the fundamental idea of Theosophy that the Universe is a Unity. Not a unit as a conceptual abstraction such as when we refer to the set of all the people of the planet, but an entity in itself.

This **Universal Principle** or **One Life** is the root of all, the Cause without cause, the **Absolute**, the **Parabrahman** (which transcends the Brahman to the Hindus).

No attribute can be asserted about the Absolute because it implies limiting and conditioning it, thus depriving it of its universal and infinite nature. When we want to approach him mentally, we incur in paradoxes because the Unity transcends the mind that needs to separate and differentiate to know.

In the next chapter of this course we will see that this fundamental idea has a meaning that escapes us to the extent that we are not able to consciously perceive this unity of the Universe. One consequence of this Principle of Unity is that all Beings, all Life in the Universe, are members of Unity, which is the basis for respect for all life and for true brotherhood.

2nd Proposition

II. The Eternity of the Universe in toto as a boundless plane; periodically "the playground of numberless Universes incessantly manifesting and disappearing," called "the manifesting stars," and the "sparks of Eternity." "The Eternity of the Pilgrim" is like a wink of the Eye of Self-Existence (Book of Dzyan.) "The appearance and disappearance of Worlds is like a regular tidal ebb of flux and reflux."



Periodic manifestation

Manvantara
(activity, manifestation)

Pralaya
(rest, unmanifested)



Law of Periodicity

The second proposition of the Secret Doctrine tell us of the Law of Periodicity of the Universe, or Law of the Cycles, where there is a succession of periods of manifestation and of rest.

Everything in nature has a cyclical expression. We live participating in countless cycles: astronomical, biological, physical, psychological and many more.

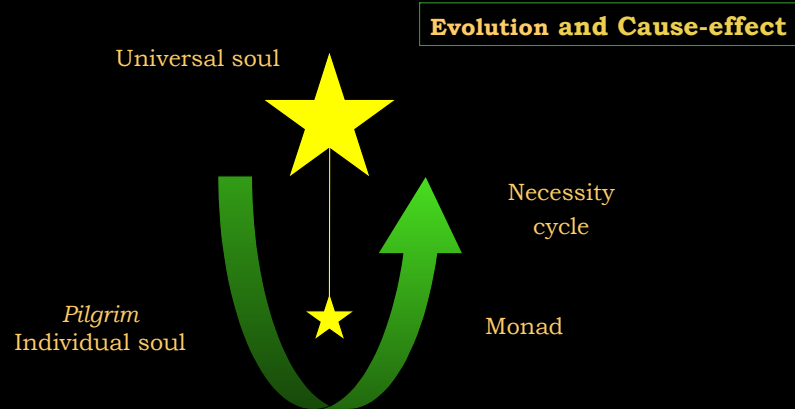
This second assertion of the Secret Doctrine is the absolute universality of that law of periodicity, of flux and reflux, ebb and flow, which physical science has observed and recorded in all departments of nature. An alternation such as that of Day and Night, Life and Death, Sleeping and Waking, is a fact so common, so perfectly universal and without exception, that it is easy to comprehend that in it we see one of the absolutely fundamental laws of the universe.

According to the law of periodicity, the manifested Universe, its matter and its creatures are expressed in a cyclical way, alternating periods of unmanifestation or rest, called **Pralaya**, in which Life is in a latent, mysterious, potential state with periods of manifestation or expression, denominated **Manvantara**, in which Life is active, expressed, differentiated.

The alternation of cycles of manifestation and rest makes sense in the light of the third Principle which explains its function.

3rd Proposition

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



The third proposition of The Secret Doctrine tells us of some closely related ideas.

First, it establishes the identity of the essence of each living being, the *Monad*, with the **Universal Soul**, which is practically a consequence of the principle of the Unity of Life, but also establishes its similarity. That is to say that the Monad is a reflection of the Universal Soul that has all its qualities in potential state.

Then the third principle tells us that all souls are subject to a process of Evolution, known among other names as the *Cycle of Necessity* because the Monad, the manifested essence of the individual Life, needs to realize it to develop itself. In this process, the individual monads are going through various states of evolution, increasingly developing their latent faculties over eons of time, passing through different states and life forms.

HPB also tells us that this Cycle of Necessity takes place according to two important laws: the **Cyclic Law** (already stated in the second proposition) and the **Law of Karma**.

The first law implies that the development of the Monad is not a one-time linear process, but occurs through cycles like everything in Nature. These cycles in the human stage are the successive incarnations that are taking the soul.

The other law mentioned is the universal law of Cause-Effect or Karma, as it is known in Sanskrit and states that every action has an effect on the present and on the future, a consequence, both on the environment and on the being that produced it.

We will see these ideas in much more detail throughout the course, but we can say that the knowledge of Theosophy is based on these essential principles of Nature. The Theosophical researcher needs to pay the utmost attention to the discovery and understanding of these principles throughout his life.

To think



Watch, think, investigate, inquire ...
Make the following questions or thoughts suggestions
But don't stay here, ask yourself and find out.

- 1- Is the Theosophy a tradition of India?
- 2- Did Theosophy disappeared from ordinary culture during some time?
- 3- Has there ever been a philosopher like Pythagoras, Socrates, or Plato who has utterly expressed the truth of Theosophy?
- 4- What authors of our time can relate to the Theosophical teaching even though they are not part of the Theosophical Society?
- 5- How could we describe the three fundamental propositions of the Proem of the Secret Doctrine in our own words?

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