

THE PATTERN AND THE LAW

By Christmas Humphreys

I have been invited to write on *The Secret Doctrine* and the contribution made by its author to world thought. As this involves an approach illustrated by personal experience rather than the usual objectivity of scholarship, I have chosen as material the twin doctrines which most appealed to me when I read the two volumes of the first edition just fifty years ago. These interrelated themes are what I call the purpose or meaning of life, and the living and intelligent law which pervades and controls the smallest part of it.

These are but two doctrines from the great store of such to be found in these volumes, yet the whole work is but an outline-drawing of the Tree of Wisdom of which all religions, large and small, are but the branches and the leaves.

How vast indeed is the "accumulated wisdom of the ages" which H. P. Blavatsky gave to the world just eighty years ago, being as much as might be told! As she herself wrote, it would be for the twentieth century to prove the claims therein set out, and she claimed no more authority for them than is inherent in the system itself, and the intuition of the student who finds it to be true.

For my double theme but a few quotations will suffice, and all these passages are preserved in *An Abridgement of the Secret Doctrine* which I helped to edit two years ago. In these 250 pages is to be found enough for a lifetime's study and application and, in the two volumes together, more, as I have found, than in all the scriptures of the world available in English.

None of *The Secret Doctrine* is to be viewed as revelation, either revealed by HPB or by the Masters who taught her all she knew. This body of teaching is indeed the "accumulated wisdom of the ages," tested and verified by generations of those who have mastered it. All these truths have been checked and re-experienced, in principle and in detail, by the independent research of hundreds of self-perfected men. These Masters of the Wisdom form what HPB called a guardian wall about humanity, and they, its servants, teach such men and groups of men, as the centuries go by, those portions which they may be trusted to use in the service of humanity. We have much of the teaching in the very words of two of them, in *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, from which we glean not only an outline of the Wisdom but the life which must be led to gain it and the sacrifice of self which this entails. For them the wisdom is the law. For them wisdom and compassion are one, to know and to teach, to experience and to apply.

What did they teach, through their chosen instrument H. P. Blavatsky, to the Europe of eighty years ago? That the universe is totally a manifestation, projection, expression or, in Eastern imagery, a breathing out of That which can never be known to human faculty nor fully described. In the Proem to *The Secret Doctrine* the author called it “Be-ness,” for Being is its child. For lack of better words she wrote of “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.” Yet if we may not know it as Be-ness, we know it as that which it becomes, the One, the penultimate but not the ultimate goal of spiritual aspiration. As a Zen master put it, “When all is reduced to the One to what is the One reduced?” The Theosophist would answer, “the Absolute”; the Hindu, “That”; the Christian mystic, in the words of Eckhart, “Gottheit, ‘Godness’ beyond God”; and the Buddhist metaphysician-mystic, “Sunyata, the Void.” Only then comes the first shadow of two-ness, when the “non-duality” (Not Two, Not One) of Zen Buddhism descends to be Two. It follows, of profound importance, that even “absolute, abstract space,” pure subjectivity, and “absolute abstract Motion,” the primordial opposites, are illusion, and when That breathes in, the universe it once breathed out will cease to be.

For one young reader this was a light blazing in the darkness, deep satisfaction for the questing mind and food for a heart that yearned, it knew not why, to serve the Masters of the Wisdom in their service of mankind. It refused—I look back with amusement at my fierce announcement—to begin a new life without at least some understanding of what it was all about. Why make a living, have a family, be successful among men, grow old and die unless the whole round of tedious activity made sense? When I learned that this was a part, however small, in a process of infinite becoming whose end and conscious purpose was a return to That from which, with all the universe, it came, I had my answer in *The Secret Doctrine*, and was and am content.

For if all in manifestation is One then humanity is one, and I did not need the Stanzas of Dzyan to tell me how and why. And the smallest form of life, whether seen or unseen, of the size of an atom or a solar system, is equally and all of it alive—all me, all other-me, all no-me in its own unique, supernal purposes.

But One is static, and I saw why Two was needed. For “God” as Absolute could not know himself as “God” unless he ceased to be God, the All. To be consciously whole he had to be less than whole. Two-ness was the visible witness to the One and the proof of it; and the tension of two-ness, with all the hell of suffering which its very existence entails, is essential if the One is to begin to move consciously on the journey back to its essential nonduality.

But two is literally inconceivable; no man can conceive just two. There must be relationship, and Fohat, the aspect of the one Life-Principle which applies, as it were, life to form, is an ancient name for the third of that Trinity which is the basis of manifestation.

For me much followed from these premises. There is tension in the universe; there must therefore be tension in me. The god in the animal has its noble desires and the will to ascend; the animal prefers its animality. But here was good and evil for me to understand and the mutual need of both. That there is absolute truth unattainable as yet, and relative truth to be known here and now was also apparent; and that the universe in its unborn essence alone is Real, and that all that we know by the senses and the thinking mind, *samsara*, is *maya*, illusion.

But all this, though to me a living reality of vision, was still remote, a plan or pattern dimly perceived but not yet usable. It needed the second affirmation in the Proem of *The Secret Doctrine* to set the vast machinery in motion, to turn a blackboard design into dynamic use. This is "the absolute universality of the law of periodicity, of flux and reflux, ebb and flow" or, in Buddhist terms the alternation of the opposites, which move in an infinite, that is, unmeasurable round of cycles large and small, from the breathing out and in of That to the "birth, growth, decay and death" of an amoeba. Even as my own life moved in a daily and yearly rhythm within the larger cycle of youth, maturity, and decay, so empires rose and fell, worlds were made and unmade, the unmeasured units of astronomical science moved in their own brain-staggering round of evolution and involution, "world without end."

But I was still unsatisfied. I still felt negative. I was a unit, albeit an essential part of the whole, to which things happened in the course of a process I could dimly perceive but in no way influence. I needed some other truth, some fresh proposition which the intellect would seize from the grasp of intuition and make its own. I found it in the Hindu-Buddhist doctrine, reproclaimed by HPB at its own supernal level, of karma, the living, intelligent, all-pervading law of justice absolute.

Karma is a truth of many meanings. The word means action, in the sense of action/reaction as equal and opposite, and was already old in the Buddha's time. In the *Bridhadaranyaka* Upanishad it is spoken of as a mighty secret which only the initiated might safely know. But the Buddha, as with much more of the ancient wisdom, made it available to all mankind as the law of moral responsibility, involving retribution for evil deeds and merit for good. In the Pali Canon the whole process by which the one life-force uses a succession of forms is described as karma in action; and the "self," which to the Theosophists is the unreal not-self, has been called by Pali scholars "a discrete continuum of karmic impulse."

All this is of vital value on the Way, but it is on a much higher plane that HPB includes it in the plan and process of the universe. According to the Wisdom it is “the Ultimate Law of the Universe, the source, origin and fount of all other laws which exist throughout Nature. Karma is the unerring law which adjusts effect to cause, on the physical, mental and spiritual planes of being; . . . Karma adjusts wisely, intelligently and equitably, each effect to its cause, tracing the latter back to its producer. Though itself unknowable, its action is perceivable.” Later, in the same passage from *The Key to Theosophy* she adds, “though we do not know what Karma is *per se* we do know how it works.” There are long portions of *The Secret Doctrine* in which its application is described. But these sentences alone, amplified with inspired comment, would fill a volume and for me they had dynamic value. They set in motion a Plan too wide for the intellect to grasp and turned a static picture into an equally vast machinery of involution evolution. Here were cycles of motion too large to follow and within them others too small to see, and somewhere within them all a place for the complex entity, at once supremely real and utterly unreal, which we, with a blend of deep humility and arrogant pride, call Man.

This concept of karma is far more than ethical causation, than the fact that “it pays to be good.” If karma is indeed the ultimate and total “Law of Laws” then all things, all events and every particle of man *is* karma and karma-made. It further follows that no man can escape the consequences of his thoughts and actions, whether he calls them “good” meaning pleasant, or “bad” meaning unpleasant. There is indeed no such thing as good or bad karma; the Law is neutral, utterly impersonal, and must be so accepted. It is “an impersonal, yet ever-present and ever-active Principle,” and no man can interfere with it. Why not? Because we are made by it, are making it, *are* it. We can no more interfere with it than we can interfere with the law of gravity.

It is intelligent, one of the most tremendous concepts in the whole of *The Secret Doctrine*. The Unmanifest Absolute comes forth as a Life-force which is deathless. It has a million million forms, each changing without pause, but none is dead. There is no death; only the coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be of the forms in which Life manifests. A dead law, therefore, has no meaning, and law itself is only our feeble concept for one aspect of the Life-force in the world of form.

It is utterly just, the impersonal process of harmony broken and restored. Harmony is indeed a key word in the understanding of karma. “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.” When the Master K.H. wrote, “we recognize but one law in the Universe, the law of harmony, of *perfect* equilibrium” he was followed by HPB herself in the translations which form *The Voice of the Silence*: “Compassion is no attribute. It is the Law of Laws—eternal Harmony, the light of everlasting right . . .”

He who meditates on the interrelation of these three aspects of one law, harmony, compassion and karma, will learn a great deal. Note the word "adjusts," so often used in HPB's long passages on karma, meaning to make just, by the law of justice, karma, that the disturbance of nature's harmony by the claim of self put forward by some foolish man may be, and must be, adjusted by that man.

Seen from below, karma is in one way destiny, fate. Seen from above it is but harmony disturbed and the disturber "fated" to "adjust" the status quo. But the total creation of karma, of effects produced by man and any man, is changing every moment of time, as man and every man is changing too. This is a swift, perpetual process, a million causes meeting to produce some new effect; a million effects on the existing state of circumstance produced by every cause. The total result is such a brain-reeling interrelation of cause/effect as few have the courage to face. There can be no such thing as chance, no "mere coincidence," and no more talk of luck whether good or bad. All is as it must be; all is, though the thought is staggering, "*right*"!

And who is at the heart of this intelligent, ever-living process which exceeds our concepts of both space and time, save man, save each of us? "Since each disturbance (of Harmony) starts from some particular point, it is clear that equilibrium and harmony can only be restored by the reconverging to that same point of all the forces which were set in motion from it." That point is each of us. Hence utter and complete responsibility of every man for all that each man thinks and wills and does. There is therefore no escape from karma and it is useless to project our insufficiency beyond the ambit of our skin. We are self-responsible and everyself-responsible, with the enormous dignity for every individual which flows from that tremendous truth. For if I seem to be at times the plaything of fate, a pawn being played by a force I cannot control, this is, in the wider view, illusion. I made things as they are or helped to make them so. I can unmake them as and when I choose to begin, and no power on earth or God in heaven can stop me. Asked by a pupil, "Master, what shall I do to be free?" a Zen master replied, "Who puts you under restraint?"

Karma, then, is the law which binds each living thing, and in that bondage sets it free. There is no freedom save within limits, and the argued conflict between law and freedom is an illusion of the human mind. In the enlightened man the will is servant to the total Will and there is no self to intervene. We struggle but for self; where self is thrust aside the power of the opposites, the tension of good/evil, part and whole, is ended. The mind steeped in awareness of the Absolute accepts the limitations of the part within the Whole. He accepts the law, is the law, and in that wisdom uses the law to the world's enlightenment. He is no more troubled about his own.

If the Plan be firmly viewed, if the law of which it is the moving force be utterly accepted, then man is free. The rest is treading the Path, in joy now, not in fear or with

a sense of blind frustration. Here is meaning and purpose in life and every hour of it, and the next job to be done. Now, with his destiny in his own hands he is at peace within and has for the first time the courage to face the immortal challenge of Thoreau, "I know that the enterprise is worthy; I know that things work well. I have heard no bad news."

This is, in my view, the contribution made by H. P. Blavatsky to world thought. Her *Isis Unveiled*, and to a lesser extent *The Secret Doctrine*, was a double-barreled attack on current religion and science, and the war between them. In this she succeeded for a while, but the rapid advance in the twentieth century of materialistic science has nearly killed out organized religion; and it is a curious practice of modern science that it flatly ignores all previous discoveries on the subject under review and looks for proof of nonmaterial knowledge within methods of proof which to higher Knowledge are quite impossible.

But the pendulum of karma never stops; and in London today, where alone I can speak with personal knowledge, there are scores of small, unorganized, nameless groups of men and women who seek for meaning in a form of life which seems to have no meaning, and to penetrate to the beyond of the physical where truth at a higher level may be found. Some of these are content with discoveries on the psychic plane; some look to the science of psychology, the nature and workings of the instrument by which the scientist accumulates his views on science; a few seek the beyond of all of these, and care not in what form or name it may be found. These are unfrightened by the word mysticism, and view metaphysics at its actual worth of *meta*-physics. Even the heart and its need of ritual and devotion is no longer despised.

What material have these few in their inquiry? There is a widespread, and to me illuminating, interest in comparative religion; so much so that every college and high school must have a series of lectures on this theme. But these brief courses avoid the depths of thought and feeling at which alone they would be worth while, and the reason is surely obvious: that none provides a Plan of the universe from its birth to dissolution, nor the proper place of Man within its finite yet immeasurable scheme. And only Buddhism teaches karma as the force which made us what we are, and enables us, without delay, to become what we would be, "just so much nearer to the heart's desire."

In all this welter of ill-digested doctrine and rootless ethics *The Secret Doctrine* of H. P. Blavatsky stands supreme and, though it is difficult to believe, unique. Of course there are those who decry the author, hurling upon her beloved memory every form of abuse, and I am surprised that the Theosophical Movement as a whole has not yet seen the importance of *Man, the Measure of all Things*, which was the result of twenty-five years study by the late Sri Krishna Prem, whom I knew well at Cambridge

University as Ronald Nixon. Here is an independent commentary on the same Stanzas from the Book of Dzyan, which complements and illumines HPB's own commentaries and surely proves that whatever else the "S.D." was it was not its author's invention!

If *The Secret Doctrine* is indeed unique in its depth and range of teaching, it is not surprising that it has sold increasingly in various editions since 1888, and that the Abridgement, selling in its thousands, should have actually stimulated the sale of the original work. Although the author prepared the way for her major work with *Isis Unveiled*, and added a new presentation of some of its themes in *The Key to Theosophy*, it is *The Secret Doctrine* by which she will be indefinitely remembered; this is her contribution to world thought and her supreme gift to mankind. For here is a work in which, for the student willing to stretch the intellect to its limits and to add the light of the intuition, is to be found as nowhere else a reasonable, coherent, all-embracing outline of the origin and ceasing-to-be of the universe, the laws which dominate the process, and the part played in it by Man.