

Exploring Theosophy

A Study Guide

by

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To be used in conjunction with Robert Ellwood's book

THEOSOPHY:

A MODERN EXPRESSION OF THE WISDOM OF THE AGES

Suitable for group work or individual study

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PREFACE

In *THE KEY TO THEOSOPHY*, H.P. Blavatsky wrote: “To the mentally lazy or obtuse, Theosophy must remain a riddle; for in the world mental as in the world spiritual each person must progress by her or his own efforts.”

This “Critical Companion” to Robert Ellwood’s book, *THEOSOPHY: A MODERN EXPRESSION OF THE WISDOM OF THE AGES*, is suitable for individuals or group work. This study guide is designed to help the inquiring student reflect on and “between” the lines and paragraphs of the text. Sometimes you will be asked to reread a passage “in slow motion” to note possible interpretations. You might be asked to cite examples you have experienced or witnessed of something referred to in the text. Or you may be given a passage from another text to compare with a passage from Robert Ellwood’s *THEOSOPHY*.

The numbers at the left margin of this study guide refer to the *page* and *paragraph* of the Ellwood text, respectively. For example, “3.4” indicates that the fourth paragraph which begins on page three is being discussed. “4.1” tells you the first paragraph on page 4 is being examined. A page number followed by a zero (i.e., “4.0”) would mean that something is being discussed in the paragraph carried over from the previous page, i.e., “Those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know.”

All page numbers in this study guide refer to the first edition (1986) of Robert Ellwood’s *THEOSOPHY*.

— Anton Lysy, Ph.D.
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INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 List some observable patterns found in nature that show order, sequence, and regularity in a manner which suggests there is an underlying “unifying principle” that can be grasped by human consciousness.
- 3.3 Using a good dictionary, compare the word *theosophy* with the more familiar words *philosophy* and *theology*. Keep these distinctions in mind as you read the rest of this book.
- 3.4 Use an unabridged dictionary to look up the words *wisdom* and *knowledge*. Compare the definitions of these two important terms.
- 3.4 The statement “divine truth is an endless ocean” is a metaphorical expression. The use of metaphor is indispensable when we attempt to communicate the subtle aspects of any subject matter. Watch out (and in) for use of metaphor, simile, and analogy throughout this text.
- 3.4 In this paragraph, how does the use of metaphor express differing dimensions of experience by citing “oceanography” and “swimming” as ways of gaining knowledge?
- 3.5 Thirty spokes share the wheel’s hub
 It is the center hole that makes it useful.
 Shape clay into a vessel;
 It is the space within that makes it useful.
 Cut doors and windows for a room;
 It is the holes which make it useful.
 Therefore profit comes from what is there;
 Usefulness from what is not there.

Tao Te Ching

Consider this passage in the light of the concept of a “unifying principle” introduced in 3.1. Does the absence of “required” dogmas in Theosophy mentioned in the Foreword (x.1) seem to be clarified by this example of how “what is not there” can be useful?

In *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, C. G. Jung wrote, “The ultimate fate of every dogma is that it gradually becomes soulless.” Cite some examples from history that illustrate a dogma losing its vitality.

- 7.2 Explain the difference between a *mystery* and a *puzzle*. What human faculties do we normally use in solving riddles or puzzles? When confronted with a true mystery, do we call upon any other faculties?
- 7.2 Consider the implications of viewing human life as part of a grand Mystery.
- 8.3 If our ultimate environment is in some sense *divine*, note that the faculty of *Sophia* (the source of insight into the infinite Reality) emerges as part of our own human constitution, as something we are equipped with at birth. (We are looking for our “owner’s manual.”)
- 9.1 Look up the word *initiation* in a dictionary; consider its definitions in terms of the metaphor “expanding horizons.”
- 10.2 Review your life and select some key people or seminal events that, in retrospect, were “stepping stones” on your journey to self-knowledge and self-transformation. Describe these “stepping stones” as “inner initiations” which transformed your consciousness and behavior.
- 11.2 In the Theosophical classic, *The Voice of the Silence*, divine compassion is characterized as the “LAW of laws—eternal Harmony.” Do you sense compassion or loving kindness at the very heart of life on this planet?
- 12.1 How can one even begin to understand the history of “Earthlings” from the perspective of an expanding universe described by modern astronomers? One could say, “In the beginning, before the Earth settled into its orbit, there was an inherent principle of orderliness.”
- 14.1 *There is no religion higher than Truth*. What are some possible interpretations of this motto of the Theosophical Society? What happens to the meaning of the motto if one replaces “religion” with “philosophy,” “science,” or “art?”
- 16.1 Look up the words *esoteric* and *occult*. Can you describe any situations in ordinary life where you would use these terms?

Chapter 1 — THEOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

- 20.2 Any metaphor will be less complex than that which it tries to convey and will, consequently, “dwarf” the reality. But note that this “PRINCIPLE” referred to in the first fundamental proposition is clearly beyond human consciousness and language.
- 22.1 Does the “confidence” in the individual seeker displayed in the theosophical tradition suggest that all humans go through an inner process of development that eventually brings about an experience, or *gnosis*, of these universal truths? Is ordinary, everyday honesty likely to be a part of this developmental process?
- 22.2 If only a relative few have reached the sense of human unity and solidarity expressed by the First Object, does this “nucleus” itself convey the hope that a greater proportion of humanity can and will share this view as awareness of the process is diffused across the planet?
- 25.3 Explain, in your own words, how Pribram’s theory of the hologram can support the kind of experiences reported as clairvoyance, precognition, retro-cognition and telepathy.
- 27.1 In Blavatsky’s description of progress in Jnana Yoga, one stage is characterized as a series of mental pictures continually revised until the picture format is transcended and the learner “enters and dwells in the World of NO FORM.” Would a black or white blank sheet of paper serve as a way of representing this state of consciousness?
- 28.2 If there is an “Unknown Root from which both consciousness and matter stem,” can there be “dead matter or wholly disembodied spirit”?
- 30.1 If one were to understand God to be “the universal Unknown Root” cloaked in Mystery, would this idea of God differ in any major way from our culture’s prevailing notion of “our” Divinity?
- 31.1 Does the idea of each individual being as a “consciousness set apart for purposes of pilgrimage” convey any sense of how each pilgrim contributes to the community of individuals? Consider, in this context, the saying from O. Hobart Mowrer: “You alone can do it, but you cannot do it alone.”

- 34.1 “What is that which was, is, and will be, whether there is a Universe or not; whether there be gods or none?” Try to come up with some possible answers to this question other than “SPACE.”
- 35.2 “Where there is a design, there must have been a Designer.” If the “Unknowable Source” is beyond our human powers of understanding, what “persuades” us to attribute consciousness to the Source?
- 38.1 In your own words, convey the distinction between “conditioned” and “unconditioned” reality. In what sense is unconditioned reality characterized as *pure space* and *pure consciousness*?
- 40.0 Look back at Pribram’s idea of the hologram (25.3). Does “feeling” or “sensing” Unconditioned Reality to be “here now, in, with, and under conditioned reality” give one a hint of how the presence of the divine is part of our human nature?
- 40.1 Is this “individualizing consciousness” the Pilgrim?
- 41.1 If the “end of probing into ultimate mysteries is never reached,” how does the quest of the Pilgrim contribute to the evolution of the universe?
- 43.2 If, whenever matter conjoins with spirit, the result is “energized by tension between matter’s inertia and spirit’s yearning for its true home,” then will our lives always be subject to conflict while we are alive?
- 45.2 List some objections to the ideas of *karma* and reincarnation.
- 48.0 Given the account of *karma* in the text, explain how the Pilgrim is not merely the passive pawn of fatalism or determinism.

49.3 Something mysteriously formed,
 Born before heaven and earth,
 In the silence and the void,
 Standing alone and unchanging
 Ever present and in motion.
 Perhaps it is the mother of ten thousand things.
 I do not know its name.
 Call it Tao.
 For lack of a better word, I call it great.

Tao Te Ching

At the East Gate of the National Center of the Theosophical Society in America, there is a bronze plaque, which reads:

ALL LIFE IS ONE AND
EVEN THE HUMBLEST FORMS
ENSHRINE DIVINITY.



Compare these two expressions of the unifying source of Reality along with any other expressions of oneness or unity that you may recall. How does “unity” differ from “uniformity?”

- 50.1 Why is the “rarefied energy” of *spirit* known only to the wise?
- 50.2 Make a list of the cycles you observe in nature and human life.
- 51.1 Betty Bland, President of the Theosophical Society in America, wrote in the January 2003 issue of the *Quest* magazine:

A beginning is a kind of initiation, one of many that we experience in a lifetime. Some initiations are a function of time, such as our passage from youth to adulthood, and again into middle age and old age. Other initiations are a result of our successfully traversing the gauntlets that life presents to us.

List some of the outer and inner changes in life that constitute a “new beginning” in the sense that the consciousness of the person going through this formal or informal initiation is somehow *elevated* or *broadened*.

- 52.3 What are some possible interpretations of the role that “advanced spiritual teachers” play in human history?
- 54.2 Radha Burnier, the 7th International President of the Theosophical Society, expressed the following at her Inauguration on August 3, 1980:

The Theosophical Society is neither a church nor a sect. It has no belief to offer, no opinions or authority to impose. In the beautiful words of Dr. Annie Besant, it is meant to be composed of students, whose “bond of union is not the profession of a common belief, but a common search and aspiration for

Truth. They hold that Truth should be sought by study, by reflection, by purity of life, by devotion to high ideals, and they regard Truth as a prize to be striven for, not as a dogma to be imposed by authority.”

Religion, from the Theosophical point of view, commences with the denuding of the mind of its favored thoughts and conditioning and allowing it to come into contact with what is of universal and fundamental significance.

How can a group with “no belief to offer, no opinions or authority to impose” serve as a catalyst “to guard and guide humankind” (53.0)?

Chapter 2—UNIVERSES, SOLAR SYSTEMS, WORLDS

- 55.1 In her Inaugural Address as 2nd International President of the Theosophical Society on June 26, 1907, Annie Besant said:

Complete liberty of thought must be guarded by all of us—by me, as your President, most of all—not granted as a privilege or a concession, but recognized as the inherent right of the intellect, as its breath of life. Tolerance, even with the intolerant, must be our rule. And this must be our principle in life and action, not only in word, lest a fatal orthodoxy, checking new initiative and new growth, should stealthily spread in the Society. We must welcome differences of thought, and give free play to their expression, so that our windows may be kept open to all new light. This is not only sound principle, but it is also sound policy, for thus only can new avenues to knowledge constantly open before us. We possess only portions of the Truth, and no searcher must be hindered or frowned upon, lest the Society should lose some fragment that he may have found. Better the temporary life of a thousand falsehoods, than stifling of one truth at the hour of its birth. I claim the help of every Theosophist in this guarding of our liberty, for universal and constant vigilance is necessary lest it should be infringed.

Does this pronouncement of the freedom of thought differ from the ideal of the scientific method? Is this commitment to liberty of expression sometimes difficult to put into practice in the fields of science and religion?

According to Bill Bryson's *A Short History of Nearly Everything* (2003), the current consensus about the age of the universe is 13.7 billion years. Astronomers estimate that there are 140 billion galaxies in the visible universe. Some astronomers believe that there are many universes, possibly an infinite number, "each with different attributes."

- 56.1 Note the flexibility of thought and language which allows one to use "Unknown Root," "Absolute Consciousness," and "God" as equivalent terms for the "Transcendent Source" or "Mystery." What term would you use to complete the following sentence?

Before the beginning, _____ was.

- 56.4 Look up *theophany* in a good dictionary and notice some of the other words, which begin with *theo*. In Ancient Greek, *theion* meant "divine" and *theos* was used for "god."

57.0 In G. de Purucker's *Occult Glossary*, "Ring-Pass-Not" is defined as follows:

A profoundly mystical and suggestive term signifying the circle or bounds or frontiers within which is contained the consciousness of those who are still under the sway of the delusion of separateness—and this applies whether the Ring be large or small. It does not signify any one especial occasion or condition, but is a general term applicable to any state in which an entity, having reached a certain stage of evolutionary growth of the unfolding of consciousness, finds itself unable to pass into a still higher state because of some delusion under which the consciousness is laboring, be that delusion mental or spiritual.

58.2 If one considers evolution as a process of bringing what is latent (potential) into form (actuality) in an orderly sequence, one can look at the unfolding from either mythical or mathematical perspectives. Consider the following in any conceivable account (mythic or scientific) of the origins of the universe:

What?.... Where?.... When?.... How?....
How much/many?.... Who?..... Why?....
To what End?.... For what Purpose?....
Where is the Container contained?

59.1 "Spirit and matter conjoined hold up the mirror of space and time to God and forget themselves in the glitter." Try to express the essence of that statement in another way.

63.1 Using your own terms, describe the differences of *Atma*, *Buddhi*, and *Manas*. If you find this task difficult, what additional information would you like to supplement the text? Perform the same operation on *Sat*, *Chit*, and *Ananda* giving special attention to your picture of the relationship between bliss and *lila*, or divine play.

63.3 "Let it be! Let it be!" Words of Wisdom from the Beatles. Finding that core of being—that sacred "is" within each of us—reveals both a still point and a turning point on the Path.

64.2 "Ontological priority" presupposes a ranking of *power* or *sacredness*—a hierarchy, an order of holy beings—from the Greek *hieros*.

- 65.1 Compare and contrast the idea of a personal God with this expression of “the impersonal, sheer being-nature of Ultimate Reality,” which can be understood as “energized space” instead of “empty/lethargic space.” The thought of the Universe itself breathing provides rhythm and sound to the “Resourceful Source” or *Adi*.
- 65.2 “...what esotericists speak of as life, science would simply call energy.” In Ancient Greece, *zoe* or life, *kinesis* or motion, and *pneuma* or breath/spirit were understood as interconnected with *theion* and each other. Life was divine even for mortals.
- 66.2 The “separate joy” of consciousness at the outset of the pilgrimage expresses the bliss (*ananda*) of being *and* becoming. Saying “Yes!” to life, in awe of the many states of consciousness and forms of being, is something we can express and feel here and now – not only at the beginning, or at the end of the pilgrimage.
- 75.1 The metaphor “robes of energy” may convey an overly specific and anthropomorphic vision for some of us. Following Rupert Sheldrake, “fields of intuitive, mental, and feeling energy” may surround each “divine spark” and yet not have a distinct “border” in the way a tailor would fashion a robe.
- (See Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, for a thorough account on how everyday metaphors enter into religious teachings and scientific theories.)
- 75.3 There can *seem* to be more than seven planes when one is learning the traditional distinctions of Theosophy. Perhaps the *etheric* can be better remembered by making it *zoetheric* to stress its proximity to biological organisms as an energy field.
- 79.2 How would you clarify the mysterious “cross-transferring of pilgrim ships,” which expresses the extraordinary “leap” from mineral, vegetative, and animal pre-conditions to humanity as we know it?
- 80.1 The account of brain and language development in evolutionary biology intersects here with what can be labeled as “mythological biology.” *The Apocryphon of John*, one of the Gnostic texts in *The Nag Hammadi Library*,

gives a more elaborate account of the “creation” of Adam than the *Book of Genesis*.

- 82.1 “Nature unaided fails.” This statement in itself carries distinct power. If you are a poet, draft a possible poem with this title.

ONE FUNDAMENTAL LAW

The radical unity of the ultimate essence of each constituent part of compounds in Nature—from star to mineral atom, from the highest Dhyan Chohan to the smallest infusorium, in the fullest acceptance of the term, and whether applied to the spiritual, intellectual or physical worlds—this unity is the one fundamental law in Occult Science

The Secret Doctrine

Chapter 3—THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

- 87.2 A. P. Sinnett writes about “the great evolutionary lifewave” in *Esoteric Buddhism*, an early Theosophical book (1883) dealing with themes that would later be developed fully in *The Secret Doctrine* (1888). HPB quotes (*Collected Writings*, Volume XII) an occult Hindu source: “All the world is in the *Swara*; *Swara* is the Spirit itself.... The proper translation of the word *swara* is *the current of the life wave....*”

Just as we follow our breathing to understand the Great Breath, the rhythm of our heart knows that waves of life and death are daily cycles on and within our planet. To welcome the new life and honor the receding life are two powerful forms of spiritual activity.

- 88.3 If one understands the term “root races” as stages of consciousness, which progressively *embrace and include* more and more dimensions of life and reality, one would never use the term in a way that would differentiate on the basis of race, creed, sex, caste, color....

O, Hidden Life, vibrant in every atom.
O, Hidden Light, shining in every creature.
O, Hidden Love, embracing all in oneness.
May all who feel themselves as one with Thee
Know they are therefore one with every other.

ALL LIFE IS ONE AND EVEN THE HUMBLEST FORMS ENSHRINE DIVINITY.

- 93.1 And the waves can be both “destroying and purifying.” The power of myth and metaphor cannot be easily quantified. What are some other ways that one can use “waves” metaphorically?
- 98.0 “As with so much theosophical teaching, its real value is in the vistas it opens and the inner connections it excites us into fusing for ourselves.”

Myth was the favorite and universal method of teaching in archaic times. There are few myths in any religious system but have an historical as well as a scientific foundation. Myths....are now found to be fables just in proportion as we misunderstand them; truths, in proportion as they were once understood.

—*Isis Unveiled*

- 99.2 What would be evidence against the notion that humanity is currently in a state of “moral decline?” What could count as evidence to support the belief that contemporary humanity is in a state of “moral decline?” Would a belief that we are in a state of moral decline mean that “at least fifty-one percent of humans are in a state of moral decline?”

Consider Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s words shortly before the Nazis executed him in 1945:

Optimism is stupid, but pessimism is cowardly.

- 103.1 Compare the “sheaths” with the various “systems” distinguished in the human body by biologists. The respiratory and digestive systems operate simultaneously in the human body. Name some others.
- 105.4 The following passage from the Rig Veda illustrates an important truth about the human condition:

Two birds, inseparable friends, cling to the same tree.
One of them eats the sweet fruit, the other looks on without eating.

On the same tree man sits grieving, immersed, bewildered by his own impotence.

But when he sees the other lord contented and knows his glory, then his grief passes away.

—Translation by Max Mueller

- 105.5 The “Silent Watcher,” according to *The Occult Glossary*, “remains at his self-imposed task, waiting and watching and helping and inspiring, and so far as we humans are concerned, in the utter silences of spiritual compassion.” Feeling and knowing the presence of this companion is central to spiritual development. Have you witnessed the Witness yet?
- 106.3 All we were and did yesterday, and all we are and do today, prepares us for all we will do and be tomorrow. C. Jinarajadasa, in his Inaugural Address as the 4th International President of the Theosophical Society, stated the following:

To create intense happiness from within our souls, such a happiness as will compensate us for the hardships of life—that is the lesson that we Theosophists have to learn, and to *teach*.

Is human creativity the cutting edge of evolution?
Do we *await* evolution or *create* evolution?

107.2 How would you picture the interactions among individual, family, community, national, global, or species karma? Can these interactions offer an explanation of how bad things can happen to good people?

109.1 Examine your own experience of having moved from one place to another. For a while, you probably missed the familiarity and, possibly, the security of the old “maps” you knew by heart, the places you enjoyed as a student, a worker, a child, a parent. As you became progressively more at home in your new neighborhood, town, or city, you found yourself less interested in what was happening back at the last place where you lived. Extend this analogy to how you can imagine or conceive after-life states of being. (Consider Thomas Wolfe’s titles *Look Homeward, Angel* and *You Can’t Go Home Again* as hints of the developmental conflict facing each pilgrim.)

110.1 As we develop, grow, or transform, we begin to disassociate (shed, discard) from certain patterns of behavior, feeling, and thought. At each point in the process of change, we have the opportunity to make the higher or more mature choice. We can also make the lower or less mature choice. If we make the lower choice at this threshold of transformation or evolution, there are still opportunities in the future to redeem oneself by making the higher choice.

N. Sri Ram, in his Inaugural Address as the 5th International President of the Theosophical Society on February 17, 1953, expressed this vision:

I believe the world is set for the growth of a new civilization, nurtured and fed on a fresh harvest from the best seeds of existing cultures, a civilization in which all that is best in the East and the West will be fused into a spiritual *cum* practical unity. Our duty is to work for a new order in which all things will be different from what they are, will have a different purpose and a different beauty, because each man will in some degree have then realized his kinship and duty towards all other men, nay towards all life, including our younger brethren, the animals. When that day dawns—we seem to see its glimmer on the far horizon a little more than the early leaders of the Society—it will make possible the evolution of a new humanity exercising a pure Intuition, in addition to a pure mind, making all things beautiful as well as good. We have to make these great possibilities come true, by illustrating, each one of us where he is, a new way of life, which will be a way of love and wisdom. In so

far as we negate whatever evil, whatever wrongness, whatever superstition, there is in our habitual modes of living – in our thoughts and our relations with others—we will be releasing a positive good. So the way is open for each one to tread; for it lies at his feet.

111.1 We have not been conditioned to thinking of our mourning and attachment to our beloved deceased as an impediment to the development of the one we have lost.

.... it is the teaching of the Wisdom-Religion of mankind, today called Theosophy, that any attempt to communicate with those who have passed on, by mediums or sensitives, or in any other wise, is a cruel injustice, perpetrated, alas, usually in ignorance, upon souls which are struggling to wing their way into brighter and grander spheres; and any such effort, even if only moderately successful, holds the departing spiritual essence back....

I may add this as a comment to what I have just written, that there is, nevertheless, a sublime way of coming into heart-touch with those whom we have loved and who have passed on, and that is through our own spiritual nature—in other words by raising our hearts in impersonal love towards the memory, the blessed memory, of those we have loved, and who are no longer physically with us.

G. de Purucker, *Studies in Occult Philosophy*

How might you respond to these words from G. de Purucker given your own experience, beliefs, and speculation?

112.0 Sometimes, when we are very ill and relatively undistracted by outside stimuli, we review our life experience with the aid of the inner light. We consequently make decisions to redirect our lives in the next stage. This assimilation and assessment might require us to do different things or to do things differently. One can think of *Devachan* in an analogous way?

112.3 It is important to remember that the teachings emphasize that we rarely carry over any memories from past lives. We carry over certain patterns of behavior, feeling, and thought—predispositions, or what Buddhism calls *skandas*.

113.2 The work of Dr. Ian Stevenson documents cases that appear to support the suggestion that some people “reincarnate rather quickly with little process of transformation on the inner planes between lives.” His detailed work is exemplary as a model of the emphasis Theosophy places on inquiry. Many of his books are available through the Henry S. Olcott Memorial Library.

114.1 Various distortions of the teaching hold that Theosophy is “from the neck up” or “from the heart up.” But a careful reading of the teachings suggests that Theosophy is “from the soles up,” *i.e.*, clearly grounded *on* and *in* the realities of the Earth today, but also clearly apprehending and envisioning how the Earth can be when the potential within humanity is actualized through evolution.

(I don't think Theosophists wear “rose colored contacts or lenses.” If anything, the opened spiritual eyes of Theosophy are “full-spectrum lenses” which see with clarity from many perspectives. —TL)

116.3 How would you explain the meaning of the following terms: *Astral Shell*, *Aura*, *Deva*, *Elementals*, *Chakras*, and *Latent Powers*? What more would you like to know about each of these notions?

Chapter 4—ON THE PATH

118.1 The verb *impel* suggests a stirring to action that comes from within. The verb *compel* suggests being forced into action from the outside in spite of inner resistance. If we are attuned to our inner life, we will have a vision of where to go next, what to do differently, how to proceed. Or we hear a calling, which directs us; or a feeling that “fits” in the way a pair of comfortable gloves fit the hands.

“The Fates lead the willing and drag the unwilling.”

—Seneca, Roman statesman and philosopher

119.2 Recent Western history has thwarted our capacity to aspire to be like those who radiate spiritual development. But all of the scandals and materialistic misdirection cannot destroy the relationship between inspiration and aspiration.

120.1 Have you encountered anyone whom you believe is truly advanced in a spiritual way? How did you come to make this conclusion? What did that person write, say, or do which convinced you?

120.2 How does one practice or work on the “two pillars” of “wisdom” and “compassion?”

121.4 How would you illustrate to others the contrast between *wisdom* and *compassion*?.... the contrast between *meditation* and *service*?.... the contrast between *study* and *inquiry*?

122.0 The heart may have noble intentions, but it needs to be guided by the clear eye of wisdom. We need to maintain a state of inner equilibrium if we are to avoid the “imminent danger of confusing the service to others with imposing our own will on them.”

Let everyone be very careful not to arrogate to himself the duty of monitoring the faults of others, for he is liable to great error. Think twice about passing judgment on the lives of other men. In the privacy of your own conscience judge yourself as you see fit before God But do not meddle in the lives of others.

—*The Cloud of Unknowing*

125.1 Please note examples for each of the five stages listed by Ellwood that you have encountered or observed in your life.

126.2 Note how the following passage taken from an anonymous 14th-century treatise on Christian mysticism relates to the second stage (preparation or purification):

Let everyone be careful not to arrogate to himself the duty of monitoring the faults of others, for he is liable to great error. Think twice about passing judgment on the lives of other men. In the privacy of your own conscience judge yourself as you see fit before God or before your spiritual father, but do not meddle in the lives of others.

—*The Cloud of Unknowing*

128.1 In the fifth stage of liberation or enlightenment, external maps and compasses are useless. The only sure guide is love.

No one can fully comprehend the uncreated God with his knowledge; but each one, in a different way, can grasp him fully through love. Truly this is the unending miracle of love: that one loving person, through his love, can embrace God, whose being fills and transcends the entire creation.

—*The Cloud of Unknowing*

128.2 Does your intuition feel comfortable with these five stages as a “generic” map of the sacred path?

129.3 How would contrast the “fourth way,” mentioned by Leadbeater, with *Bhakti Yoga*, *Karma Yoga*, or *Jnana Yoga*?

131.3 Note that the teachings tell us that we are at the stage of development when we are the most separate and isolated from each other. And yet we are equipped to transcend the “Great Heresy” of separateness. The Alone becomes the One once again.

134.2 The idea of evolving from “Inept” to “Adept” should not be interpreted in terms of the gender issues of our plane. The Adept is beyond sexual division.

136.3 Our species has struggled with the problem of the projection of spiritual qualities onto people who have only *personas* or masks that give a surface rendering of the image of spirituality. The Masters in our tradition are truly

“part of the background” and will not allow themselves to become idols, heroes, or gods. Nor will the Masters do our work for us, individually or collectively. They teach that the only magic that works is work that *we* do, individually and cooperatively.

- 140.2 Note that these differences, for most of us, are differences occurring within a realm invisible to us. Let the visible become visible—when we are ready.
- 143.0 In your own words, elaborate (intuitively) on the meaning of each of the seven rays. Note the metaphor of the full spectrum.
- 143.3 It is so very important to grasp that these advanced beings are working for a Design or Good that is “cross-cultural and cross-religious.” (One could add “cross-philosophical and cross-scientific” to give a fuller picture.) The waves of evolution pass through every business in *The Yellow Pages*, every species, every place. As Christian theologian Francis Schaefer said, “There are No Little People or Insignificant Places.”

John Coats, 6th International President of the Theosophical Society, stated the following in his Inaugural Address, December 26, 1973:

Some of us are wiser—some less—some amongst us have a greater intellect, while others are not so endowed; some men have loving hearts that are open to all, while others have such problems with their emotions and their pride – but no-one is perfect and we have to learn to accept each other as we are, for better or for worse. Let us then act in a spirit of true brotherhood to our friends and acquaintances, our mentors and dependants everywhere, for Brotherhood is an expression of Love and in love all are equally entitled.

Chapter 5 — THEOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF EVIL

- 145.1 Consider the situations where you would use the following adjectives as equivalent to “evil” in the sense of being “morally objectionable”: *bad*, — *immoral*, — *iniquitous*, — *naughty*, — *nefarious*, — *sinful*, — *vicious*, — *wicked*, — *wrong*. What are some of the different connotations these words carry?

Consider “evil” in contrast to: *harmfulness*, — *offensiveness*, — *malevolence*.

Consider also how evil is sometimes used as a noun to convey: *sin*, — *wickedness*, — *wrong*, — *bad*, — *badness*, — *ill*, — *curse*, — *crime*.

Is there a verb that you might use to convey the meaning of “evil-doing”?

- 145.2 Explain how the question, “If the Unknowable Source is neutral, why does evil exist?” differs from the contrasting question, “If God is good, why does she permit evil?” Another way of fostering an inquiry into this issue is to ask, “When and where, in the evolution of the cosmos (Cosmogogenesis), did evil first appear?”

Inquiry is an exciting process! As Colonel Olcott expressed it in his 1875 Inaugural Address, “We seek, inquire, reject nothing without cause, accept nothing without proof: we are students, not teachers.” Theosophists are thus “simply investigators, of earnest purpose and unbiased mind, who study all things, and hold fast to that which is good.”

- 145.3 “There is no avoiding the fundamental fact that _____ exists in human experience, whether you interpret it as illusion or necessity or whatever.” Place a word that differs from ‘evil’ in the blank (‘beauty’ or ‘duty’ or ‘x’).

Now consider what it means “to interpret a fact” as *illusion* or *necessity*. Are there really two steps in the process: (1) determining if _____ is a fact, and (2) interpreting or assessing the fact?

- 146.1 Consider the “sins of omission” that hold us responsible for both what we do and what we do not do. Some of us were taught to expect a meeting with St. Peter where he would show us all we did wrong. But were we taught we would be shown all the good we could have chosen to do and chose not to do?

- 146.2 When and where, in the processes of cosmogenesis and/or anthropogenesis, did *suffering* first appear?
- 146.3 If the word *evil* were defined as “that which we feel ought not to be, yet is,” would the answer differ from person to person, culture to culture, or period to period?
- 146.4 Note that the statement “evil blocks or prevents something from being what it is or is meant to become,” uses the metaphor of *blockage* or *obstacle* to convey the essence of evil. What are some other metaphors, which convey the essence of evil to you?
- 147.1 Are the two categories “comprehensible to the human intellect” and “compatible with human purposes” totally clear to you? If not, what more would you want to know before you would use these two distinctions?

Is something that is “*incomprehensible* to the human intellect” necessarily “bad” or “undesirable?” Could “*incompatible* with human purposes” conceivably be something “good” or “desirable?”

- 147.2 “To fend off its terror, humans have constructed all sorts of philosophical battlements and strained mightily to see the world’s rewards and punishments distributed more even-handedly than appears on the surface.” Consider the following viewpoints to the topic of evil:

If virtue can shine only by clashing with opposing appetites, shall we then say that it cannot do without the assistance of vice, and that it owes to vice its repute and its honor?

—Montaigne

Ignorance, the root and the stem of every evil.

—Plato

Evil is of necessity, for there must be a contrary to good.

—Plotinus

Whatsoever things hinder man’s perfecting of his reason, and capability to enjoy the rational life, are alone called evil.

—Spinoza

148.2 Susan Neiman's outstanding book—*Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (2002)—cites the earthquake which destroyed the city of Lisbon in 1755 as a turning point in the history of *theodicy* (the theological attempt to justify faith in God in the face of the world's evils). ACTS OF GOD! ACTS OF MOTHER NATURE! NECESSITIES OF PHYSICS! When awful things happen through the awesome forces of the unknown sources.

"If terrible things happen to humans, does that mean that those humans *deserved* what happened?" Clint Eastwood's character as a bounty hunter in the film *The Unforgiven* responds to his younger colleague's remark, "They had it comin'," with "We all have it coming, kid!"

149.1 If evil is, in fact, "fundamentally irrational, a reversion to chaos and meaninglessness," can good come out it?

151.0 Those who would claim, "All good is from Spirit" and "No good is from Matter" would imprison the "lively soul" within the "fleshly casket." But the body is alive with the sound of music! To Pythagoras, one (1) was not just a number but also the *source of all numbers* beginning with two (2).

In Lao-tzu's *Tao Te Ching* (translated by Red Pine), passage 42 states:

The Tao gives birth to one
One gives birth to two
Two gives birth to three
Three gives birth to ten thousand things
Ten thousand things with *yin* at their backs
And *yang* in their embrace
And breath between for harmony....

151.3 Does one becoming two have to be interpreted as a "fall"? Can one cell or share of stock splitting be a "rise" or a "windfall?"

152.3 Evolution as a form of "blockage" can be understood as a process of *redistributing* the cells of Life into ever more complex forms, which support the extension of consciousness. If we can *intuitively see* the whole process of evolution much as we watch the time-lapse photography of a seed become a flower, the parts and periods of the evolutionary process may make better sense.

- 152.3 One may not envision or think of the consequences of one's choices. What is the difference between "being responsible for" _____ and "being *held* responsible for" _____?
- 153.1 Enter the contrasting metaphor to blockage—"the free flow of spiritual cause." Some observers hold that no generation has ever been as bombarded by as much external stimuli as our generation. This emphasis on what is happening outside of us becomes a source of blockage by *distracting us from the inner voice and the inner vision*, which flow through us. Thus we are both dammed and damned by our loud and ostentatious media culture if—and *only if*—we do not pay sufficient attention to our inner lives through meditation, reflection, and helping others.
- 154.1 Do you feel differently when you (a) consider your fate to be in the hands of a jealous deity who plays favorites (*i.e.*, Job?) from those times when you (b) think what happens to you flows from impersonal laws and causes? Illustrate the difference, if there is any difference.
- 155.3 Consult a good dictionary for definitions of the word *magic*. Compare them with Robert Ellwood's description of magic as "power exercised through consciousness."
- 157.2 – 158.1
Express your reactions to these thoughts from the Mahatmas.
- 164.0 The Unknowable Source aside, does the possibility that this universe was made by imperfect beings offer you any comfort or support? Would the possibility that no being or beings were involved bring more or less comfort?

Chapter 6—VEILED TRUTH

167.1 George Arundale, in his 1934 Inaugural Address as the 3rd International President of the Theosophical Society, stated:

The Society is in no way concerned with the beliefs and opinions of those who seek membership, any more than it is concerned with the beliefs and opinions of those who are already members. These, whether private or public, are their own affair exclusively. But the Society is surely concerned that each member shall be a source of goodwill, understanding and solidarity, and not a source of constant discord. In the interests of its own self-preservation the Society has a duty to expect that members will so live that all outer differences of belief and opinion and mode of living, which naturally and rightly separate them, shall tend to strengthen and not to weaken the inner and indissoluble tie of the One Life which all share, and which is the very heart itself both of Theosophy and the Theosophical Society.

What assumptions do individuals have to share to insure that “goodwill, understanding, and solidarity” are not eroded by the inevitable differences of culture, opinion, style, and fashion that can be so corrosive when worldviews are in opposition?

167.2 “For ‘God and immortal spirit’ are none other than consciousness as the *a priori* in both the universe and the individual respectively. The fact that this truth is common to the religions of all humanity makes human brotherhood not only an ideal but on a deeper level also *a priori* truth.”

What does the Latin phrase *a priori* mean? If you are not sure, look it up in a good dictionary. Then restate the previous passage in your own words.

168.3 Classicist Paul Woodruff, in his book *Reverence* (2001), describes this forgotten or neglected virtue as follows:

Reverence begins in a deep understanding of human limitations; from this grows the capacity to be in awe of whatever we believe lies outside our control – God, truth, justice, nature, even death. The capacity for awe, as it grows, brings with it the capacity for respecting fellow human beings, flaws and all.

How can we “learn” to feel reverence for the myths, songs, dances, rituals, and symbols of ancient cultures? Would the process of learning to feel reverence differ if we were looking at the contemporary religions and cults spread around our planet? Can we *prepare* to feel reverence for the religions

and ceremonies of beings from outside of the Earth? (Note how “looking down” and “looking up” and “looking at” can express differing attitudes, feelings, and behavior.)

171.1 Pattern and ritual are important in both expressing and maintaining memory and thus tribal wisdom. If a sense of security is engendered by ritual, one can understand the uproar when new emerging ideas alter traditional ways. Have you witnessed or experienced the feelings that accompanied change in the religion(s) you knew while growing up? If so, please describe some examples.

175.2 “We are then brought to an equally important theosophical concept concerning religion, its decline. Religions, we are told in *Isis Unveiled*, ‘in time become adulterated.’”

Do you think it is inevitable that religions experience a decline over the span of many centuries? What might be some of the reasons for the diminishing influence of a religion over time?

176.0 “Knowledge of the mighty secrets beneath the world of appearances is a tremendous lever for good or ill....” Do you note any pattern in history that would suggest that Religions, then Philosophies, and then the Sciences successively become accepted as the primary authority on the “mighty secrets?”

176.1 What is the primary source for “the current language?” Does the media present images and behaviors that allow for, or support, reverence and spirituality and religion? The popular TV show *Touched By An Angel* has been cited as evidence that television for the masses takes into consideration spiritual factors. How effective is the media in portraying religion or spirituality in a realistic and positive way?

177.2 Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) was a German philosopher who was one of the originators of existentialism. Why did he term the 5th-century B.C.E. the Axial Age?

178.2 Speaking of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, Robert Ellwood says, “they all share certain salient features intimately linked to the unique era in which they arose.” What are some of those features? How did those features shape those religions?

179.2 Do you find Eliade's concept of the "terror of history" to be useful in your understanding of current events?

181.2 What is your favorite number? Did someone assign you that number (*i.e.*, your Social Security number)? Were you taught to prefer that number? Did someone you admire (Mother Theresa) wear that number on her/his uniform? Is there a number that you find repulsive (181.2)? From "where" does the significance of a number come? Are people who prefer odd numbers "goats" while those who prefer even numbers are "sheep?"

186.0 Theosophy does not nonchalantly say, "all religions are alike or teach exactly the same thing but in different words. Religious history is a more complicated matter than such easy generalizations imply."

People are attached to the uniqueness of their faiths and resent any homogenous system that reduces these differences to equivalence. But people can have equal regard and understanding for traditions differing from their own creeds.

If Theosophy does *not* portray all religions as expressing the same views but in different words, exactly how, according to Ellwood, does Theosophy characterize the world's religions?

187.1 If Theosophy is more a way of seeing (visionary) than a way of talking, and more a way of listening and feeling than a way of arguing, then the cultivation of silence, both alone and with others, becomes an indispensable practice.

188.1 Robert Ellwood uses "appreciation and reserve" to characterize the attitude that a Theosophist is uniquely equipped to have when visiting the temples of the world. What words, beyond "maturity and dignity," would you use to describe the inner state of consciousness that theosophy both generates and radiates?

188.2 George Arundale ended his Inaugural Address with the following words:

For my own part, I offer a very eager and heartfelt devotion to the splendid Cause which unites us in comradeship, in seeking and in service. May our motto be:

TOGETHER, THOUGH DIFFERENTLY !

Chapter 7—THEOSOPHICAL LIVING

- 189.1 John Coats, the 6th International President of the Theosophical Society, made the following observations in his 1973 Inaugural Address:

If we think back...to the Society's early beginnings, we might, I think, try to put ourselves in thought and feeling in the shoes of Madame H.P. Blavatsky and Col. Olcott. How must she have felt as she shouldered the burden of seeking to bring the ageless wisdom (Theosophy) into a world of materialism? What must he have thought as he laid his plans for founding the world Society committed to his charge? Have we today any real awareness of the sense of mission, of complete dedication and unswerving purpose that must have characterized their efforts and moved them to a life of endless self-sacrifice?

To what extent have HPB and HSO been worthy as models who lived the life of Theosophy?

- 189.2 How do you interpret the expression "nothing is trivial?" Are there not inconsequential things such as off-white lies, envy, foolish pride, sloth, greed, momentary anger, and occasional lust, which are not all that important in the vast scheme of evolution?
- 190.1 Observe that right living is seen to flow positively from "deep wisdom and compassion" rather than a life that is dammed, restricted, inhibited, or contained negatively by external obstructions. What would be your ten "Thou Shalts _____" ?
- 190.3 Please keep in mind the following quotation from the 6th International President of the TS as you read this section on Duty.

A balanced Theosophist is one who goes out to the circumference as he goes in towards the center—inwards to experience more of the reality of the One, and outwards to share this understanding in a useful service to others that demands of us that we try to see the world about us as it is and not as we may only have imagined it to be. Hence the need for each of us to interest ourselves in the world in which we live and in all that is going on, in the findings of Science with its many branches, and in the efforts being made by the United Nations and other international groups to bring about a widespread understanding of man's essential unity with the universe around and with his fellows nearer at hand.

—1973 Inaugural Address by John Coats

- 191.2 Observe has been your *svadharma* up to now? Have there been different aspects of it developing at differing rates?
- 193.2 “Once an evil is *perceived* as evil, it is no longer even a ‘relative’ good but something that evolution is ready to do away with.” From 1861-65, our country struggled with whether or not slavery was properly perceived as an evil or not. What are some current issues that we, as a nation, are currently struggling with against a contextual backdrop of good and evil?
- 205.1 “You alone can do it, but you cannot do it alone.” Never lose sight of this wisdom from psychologist Hobart Mowrer, and our dependence on the kindness of strangers past, present, and future. *Viva Gratitude!*
- 209.5 Elaborate on what you have come to understand as the *attitude, set of ideas, and lifestyle* of one committed to the wisdom and vision of Theosophy.

For if our work be the apotheosis of commonsense as it has so often been called, then surely Those who are interested in aiding mankind as a whole, will quite naturally and obviously choose for Their work those persons, means or instruments that seem to Them to offer the greatest chances of success. Whilst, then, we may feel optimistically hopeful, let us remain very awake and aware, with wide-open eyes, hearts, and minds.... For it depends as ever on ourselves, not so much on what we should like to attain but in what manner we can fit most usefully into Their plan.

—John Coats, 1973 Inaugural Address