

AN INTRODUCTION TO
ESOTERIC PRINCIPLES

FOURTH EDITION

A Study Course
by
William Doss McDavid



Department of Education
THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN AMERICA
P.O. Box 270, Wheaton, IL 60187-0270
www.theosophical.org

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PREFACE

One of the most difficult tasks before the student of Theosophy is to bridge the gap between the elementary and the more advanced studies. Our literature contains many examples of both extremes, but there are relatively few presentations which attempt to lead the student across the abyss which separates the two. An attempt has been made in this work to aid in bridging this abyss to some extent. It is assumed that the reader has read or studied some of the available Theosophical literature and has tried—perhaps he or she may think unsuccessfully—to read some of the more difficult works. It is hoped that this guide for study will provide at least the fundamentals which will prepare the student to tackle the more advanced materials, to wrestle with the perplexing questions contained therein, and to form his or her own opinions intelligently. Knotty philosophical problems and difficult points in the teaching have been dealt with as well as some of the less technical aspects.

It seems necessary to point out with complete honesty and candor those points where later writers seem to be at variance with or diverge from the teaching given by H. P. Blavatsky and the Masters of Wisdom in the early days of the Theosophical Society. To do so is to lay oneself open to the charge of setting up HPB as an authority. On that point, the writer can only plead guilty and beg for mercy.

The writer also begs forgiveness for diverging from the teaching in those places where his own understanding is imperfect. Such is the curse which falls upon the heads of those of us who presume to write about Theosophy without ourselves being, as HPB was, the direct amanuensis of the Mahatmas.

Each time this study manual has been reprinted, I have been tempted to make all sorts of changes to reflect my changing understanding over the years. Such an extensive revision would involve altering and expanding the text so greatly that it would no longer serve the purpose for which it was written. I have therefore contented myself with a minimum number of changes in hopes that the guide will continue to be useful to a certain class of students. This time around I am particularly grateful to David Bruce and Nicholas Weeks for reviewing the manuscript and making suggestions for its improvement.

William Doss McDavid
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Chapter 1

Schools of Esoteric Teaching

Theosophy has been called the Wisdom Religion. The word stems from the Greek words “theos” (God) and “sophia” (Wisdom) and refers to the “Wisdom of the Gods.” This Divine Wisdom, tradition relates, was brought to earth in the infancy of humanity by a superhuman race, the leaders of which have been remembered as the gods and legendary heroes of mythology. It was these great beings who taught humanity its first lessons in science, art, and philosophy and who laid the foundations for world culture.

It is said that the Divine Wisdom was taught openly to the first human races. It was only during the time of the fourth, or Atlantean, race that it became hidden from the sight of the majority. The reason for this secrecy was explained by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in the following words:

The first, semi-divine, pure and spiritual Races of Humanity . . . had the “truths of God,” and lived up to them, and their ideals. They preserved them, as long as there was hardly any evil, and hence scarcely a possible abuse of that knowledge and those truths. But evolution and the gradual fall into materiality is also one of the “truths” and also one of the laws of “God.” And as mankind progressed, and became with every generation more of the earth, earthly, the individuality of each temporary Ego began to assert itself. It is personal selfishness that develops and urges man on to the abuse of his knowledge and power. And selfishness is a human building, whose windows and doors are forever wide open for every kind of iniquity to enter man’s soul . . . Hence the necessity of gradually taking away from man the divine knowledge and power, which became with every new human cycle more dangerous as a double-edged weapon, whose evil side was ever threatening one’s neighbor, and whose power for good was lavished freely only upon self. Those few “elect” whose inner natures had remained unaffected by their outward physical growth, thus became in time the sole guardians of the mysteries revealed, passing the knowledge to those most fit to receive it.
(*Collected Writings*, 14:40-41)

Thus from those days were established the Mystery Schools in which the Wisdom Teachings were preserved for the worthy.