

# PURPOSE BEYOND REASON

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“The whole essence of truth cannot be transmitted from mouth to ear. Nor can any pen describe it, not even that of the Recording Angel, unless man finds the answer in the sanctuary of his own heart, in the innermost depths of his divine intuition.”

*The Secret Doctrine, iv, 85.*

# PURPOSE BEYOND REASON

## I

### THE LIMITATIONS OF REASONABLE SYSTEMS

When we approach the writings of Madame Blavatsky in a spirit of research, we are at once involved in certain difficulties.

There is, of course, a kind of research, of a historical and editorial nature, which can be pursued with respect to her writings just as it can be applied to anybody else's. But it is when we treat the writings themselves as a field of information that difficulties arise, difficulties that are baffling to a systematic mind.

Whenever a writer leaves behind him an impressive body of work which deals with the nature and meaning and purpose of the universe, an effort is nearly always subsequently made to draw together and summarize his ideas and present them as a "system of thought." And if that writer of the past is a really great thinker the effort is nearly always a failure.

To take an outstanding example—one might almost say a notorious example—good and earnest and learned men have been trying for over two thousand years to expound Plato's "system of thought"; and they have never, for all their piety and wit, produced an altogether convincing and satisfying description of that "system." For Plato's work displays great flashes of insight, each illuminating a broad field of human experience or speculation, and each embodied in a powerful phrase or a striking image, but not apparently capable of being fitted together into a shapely and coherent system of thought. The pieces have never really been made to fit. And this very fact, so baffling to systematic thinkers who have come afterwards and have sought to make Plato tidy, is what preserves for us Plato's perpetual freshness and retains for his work a certain evasive and unpredictable vitality and beauty.

The explanation of this difficulty would seem to be, not that Plato was an inconsistent person who contradicted himself, but that in some fashion his stature outpassed the level and limits of merely systematic thinking. If we could ascend to that stature and look out with the same eye upon the fields of discourse with which he was concerned, we should doubtless see the complete and coherent harmony of his thought, see life made shapely through the lens of his temperament; but we should not necessarily be able to express in systematic terms what we thus perceived.

In fact there are certain works which have an esoteric content. They are written, partly at least, from a point of view which cannot be systematically expressed within

the limits of language as language has so far evolved. They contain something which is not amenable to systematic explanation or exposition or examination.

Madame Blavatsky's work certainly presents difficulties of this kind.

In her case, indeed, the difficulties are both heightened and concealed by the fact that a great part of her work was concerned with subjects which do have a somewhat systematic character, such as the phases and developments of an ordered universe or the planned succession of races upon a hierarchically governed planet or the principles which all human nature has in common. Any orderly treatment of such subjects can easily lead us to imagine that everything is far more systematic than it was her intention to imply.

One who knew Madame Blavatsky wrote of her that she "saw many things for herself, but her mind, so far as we could understand it, for it was a very gigantic mind, worked somewhat differently from ours. If one may say it with respect and reverence, it was of an Atlantean type in that it massed together vast accumulations of facts but did not make much effort at arranging them. Swami T. Subba Rao said that *The Secret Doctrine* was a heap of precious stones. There is no question that they are precious stones, but one must classify them for oneself; she did not attempt to do that for us, for she did not feel the need of it at all."<sup>1</sup>

Students of Madame Blavatsky's work might certainly seem to find there a positive bias against the more tidily systematic approach to any subject; and often that seeming bias must have had a purpose. Thus, in choosing from eastern cultures an idiom through which to express universal teachings, she drew much, so far as Hindu tradition was concerned, upon the Tantra rather than upon some of those Indian philosophical schools which seem more appealing and less baffling to the systematic western mind; and, so far as Buddhism was concerned, she drew upon northern or Mahayana Buddhism rather than upon the more defined and tidy southern Theravada tradition which is now becoming so popular in the west.<sup>2</sup>

Much literature in the theosophical movement since her day has attempted to systematize still further the subjects with which she dealt. Even she herself used tables and diagrams. Nevertheless she was in constant revolt against the possibility that the study of her works should lead to people stopping short at the gratifying possession of a tidy system. She kept declaring that the numbering was not in correct order, that the correspondences did not really correspond, that the half had not been told. To put facts in tidy order was not, for her, evidence of a deep understanding. To systematize

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<sup>1</sup> C. W. Leadbeater in *Talks on the Path of Occultism*, p. 903

<sup>2</sup> Josephine Ransom, *Madame Blavatsky as Occultist*, pp. 19 and 31

too finely might be to put a limit, a “ceiling” as we now say, upon something that is innately quite a stranger to limits.

Thus, while research into Madame Blavatsky’s work can, up to a point, quite properly take the form of collating passages and bringing together portions of systems in order to understand more fully what it is that she is trying to describe, there is a large part of her work that needs to be approached in a rather different way.

## II

### PROCESS, PASSION AND PURPOSE

It is understandable that a great deal of the most intensive study that is given to Madame Blavatsky’s work is devoted to those portions of it which deal with the system of things, with the processes of the universe and the processes of man, matters capable of rational study and rational appreciation. But a very large part of her work, and perhaps a somewhat neglected part, deals with irrational or non-rational subjects.

It is in the non-rational aspect of life that purpose lies. As soon as we rationalize anything and explain it, it ceases to be purpose and becomes process. Explanation of anything involves placing it in a context or comparing it with something else; and as soon as that is done we are no longer concerned with purpose but with process. No matter how subtle may be the rational description given of the underlying motive and purpose in things, we find that, as soon as the description is given, we are concerned, not with a purpose, but with a process, and purpose has eluded us. We may trace the purpose of things back, layer after layer, and come finally to such an image as “ceaseless eternal Breath which knows Itself not”;<sup>3</sup> but even that is a description of process, and we are left wondering what the purpose is and why the Breath breathes.

It is this same problem of purpose in human life which has led a long series of philosophers, from Hume to our own times, to declare that reason is and ought to be “the slave of the passions.”<sup>4</sup> The word “passions” is not, of course, intended in this connection to have any adverse implications. It does not refer to evil passions. It refers simply to something beyond reason or apart from reason. Reason is concerned with means, or, as we have already expressed it, with process; but reason cannot be used to describe the end and purpose of life, for reason does not contain that end and purpose and is not its source. As soon as we attempt to give a rational description of the end and purpose, we find that it has eluded us and that we are still describing, not purpose, but only its expression in terms of means and of process.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Secret Doctrine* (Adyar ed.), i, 92, 125

<sup>4</sup> For a modern expression of this view, cf. Bertrand Russell, *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* (1954)

We may certainly have discovered a deeper layer of process and may have done something well worth doing; but we have not described purpose. Again and again the rational mind receives intimations that, underlying the world which it can examine and describe, there is something deeper, something which is beyond its power to comprehend and which yet alone gives purpose to the whole life process which the mind surveys.

Perhaps an awareness of purpose may come to us as an intimation; but it does not come as an explanation. Sometimes, perhaps, an intimation comes to us, riding, as it were, upon the back of an explanation; but it does not come caged inside the rational meaning of the explanation.

### III

#### OUR CHANGING ATTITUDE TO THE NON-RATIONAL

The most read part of Madame Blavatsky's work, particularly in *The Secret Doctrine*, is, of course, an account of man and the universe. It is an account which can be studied in a rational manner, which can be classified and systematized and explained, an account of process.

But there is also a large part of her work which is concerned with the irrational or non-rational element in life, the element in which the quest for purpose may begin. In the first instance, that non-rational material with which she deals is mythology. A very large part of *The Secret Doctrine*, like its predecessor *Isis Unveiled*, is concerned with mythology and legends and folklore, material that is brought into being and given shape by the emotive and non-rational side of human nature.

At the rational level, we can discover a great deal about this mythic element, because, although it is not itself rational or systematic, it leaves a deep imprint of its pattern upon nearly everything with which the mind has to deal. The study of pattern is the way in which, at the present day, the rational mind is trying to understand the non-rational part of human nature. It is through pattern that intellect is trying to understand the nature of love and passion and all the lyrical side of life.

In Madame Blavatsky's day this study of the non-rational pattern in life had not yet been given much attention. The world of intellect was dominated by a bleak rationalism which examined the mechanisms of nature in a largely materialistic and utilitarian spirit. The non-rational forces of human nature were, to say the least, generally treated with condescension rather than with respect. But today the world of intellect tends more and more to see nature in terms of organisms rather than of mechanisms; and, since it is being increasingly recognized that human beings are themselves organisms rather than mechanisms, there is a certain responsive sympathy

shown towards all organic behavior. Above all, the non-rational forces of human nature are being accorded an increasing appreciation and dignity. The pattern which that non-rational side of our nature makes is being made the subject of patient and sympathetic research, particularly in the fields of social studies and psychology.

*The Secret Doctrine* was first published in 1888, and it had been preceded, as a study of mythology and the non-rational, by *Isis Unveiled* in 1877. Almost coinciding in time with the production of Madame Blavatsky's monumental work, there appeared in 1890 the first of many successive editions of another great work dealing with mythology and the non-rational side of social behavior, *The Golden Bough* by Sir James Frazer. About the same time Freud was occupied with his first investigations into what we might call the private mythologies of individuals; and in 1895 he published, with his collaborator Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*, which is generally regarded as the first great work in the literature of psychoanalysis.

We can see in these, and in some other events at that time, signs of the dawning of a new attitude in the intellectual west towards the irrational or the non-rational. In medieval times, and even in Renaissance times, the mythic side of life, the non-rational side, was accepted as dominant and right, to be met with faith and submission. Reason could be lawfully exercised only within the limits established by the myth, and the noblest exercise of reason was in justification of the myth. But with the coming of the Baconian attitude towards science, the establishment of the Royal Society, and other developments in the seventeenth century, there came an "Age of Reason," when myth was pushed aside and thoughtful people tried to conduct their lives and their work on principles of reason.

That was, of course, a very great achievement; but it was not enough. The Age of Reason was notoriously the age of the great eccentrics, or, as we should now say, the age of the great neurotics. Reason alone did not provide adequate purpose for a happy life; and the non-rational element, deprived of the outlets which it had had in earlier conditions of thought and society, now thrust its powerful though unacknowledged and unwanted presence into the tidy lives of those carefully reasonable people and produced eccentricity, fear and sometimes insanity.

The Romantic reaction which followed had a deep influence upon literature and the arts but very little upon men of science, and it was only towards the close of the nineteenth century that they began to take the first step in acknowledging the non-rational or mythic element in life and treating it as a proper subject for serious research. It was a first step towards healing a split in our culture between mind and heart, though it had been a necessary and useful split.

Since that time, while we continue to try to remain firmly established in the rational side of our lives, we have come to regard the non-rational, the mythic, the

lyrical, with sympathy and warmth, not as a mere field of research, but also as a healthy and necessary aspect of a complete human life.

It is probable that this transition of values and sympathies, which can be traced in the history of western thought, can also be found to have taken place in the individual lives of many people both inside and outside the Theosophical Society. For example, the biography of Annie Besant, very much the child of her age as well as of the ages, shows just the same phases—first an acceptance of myth and the subordination of reason to it, then the assertion of reason and the rejection of myth, and then a rediscovery of myth and a reconciliation of reason and myth, achieved in her case through theosophy. A rather similar succession of experiences probably occurs in a good many people's lives, on their way towards theosophy or towards some other form of mystical enlightenment or psychological integration.

This transition which we can see in individuals and in contemporary society—a transition from an uncritical acceptance of the non-rational, through a phase of more or less severely rational thinking, to quite a new appreciation of the non-rational—is an epitome, within a small cycle, of a transition which is achieved in much vaster cycles and perhaps in some fashion in the whole cycle of universal existence. As an individual experience it certainly casts much light upon the place of reason in human evolution.

#### IV

### THE INTERPRETATION OF MYTH

On the principle that purpose cannot be discovered in those processes which can be systematically examined by the rational mind, but must rather be sought in intimations which take their rise outside the rational and outside the systematic, there opens out a wide and almost unexplored field of research for students of Madame Blavatsky's work. It is possible here to summarize only briefly some general features of her treatment of the mythic and non-rational side of life.

Myth, folklore, the stories of gods and goddesses—all this kind of material is interpreted in *The Secret Doctrine* as a pattern formed by creative, motive and emotive forces. It is a symbolic record of the relationships and movements of the creative and motivating forces at work in the universe; and it is at the same time also a record of the motivating forces in individual man. For there is an intimate correspondence between the principles in the universe and the principles in man.

Again and again it is asserted in *The Secret Doctrine* that “man is the microcosm of the universe” and that “as above so below.”<sup>5</sup> As the image of the sun is reflected in myriads of dewdrops, so is the nature of universal Reality reflected in the natures of the myriads of humanity. Indeed, from a certain point of view, no such simile can ever be adequate; for in a mysterious way the One is the many and the many are the One, and the principles, whether regarded as universal or as human, are identical. On the one hand Madame Blavatsky wrote that the Logos or Demiurge is “the qualitative compound of a multitude of Creators or Builders,”<sup>6</sup> thus implying that in Its creative aspect the One is many; and on the other hand she wrote of the spiritual Monad as “One, Universal, Boundless and Impartite, whose Rays, nevertheless, form what we, in our ignorance, call the ‘Individual Monads’ of men,”<sup>7</sup> thus asserting that the many are One.

It is this assertion of underlying unity which makes Madame Blavatsky’s treatment of mythology quite different from that of other writers contemporary with her. Frazer, for example, traced a certain pattern of social behavior and myth to a common ground of ignorance and to primitive associations of ideas on the subject of fertility and sacrifice. A similar blend of craving, instinct and groping ignorance seemed to produce the same pattern of behavior in different widely separate parts of the world. And Freud found a similar common ground for a pattern of irrational behavior in the inability of individuals to outgrow an orientation towards the sexual objectives of infancy. For Freud and Frazer alike, the pattern of behavior and myth gained its universal character only from the similarity of vast numbers of more or less identical individuals. But for Madame Blavatsky myth was universal because it was grounded in that one transcendent Unity in whose image all individuals are made and of which each is a microcosm.

In dealing with the fluidic, non-rational, motivating element in human life, Madame Blavatsky was concerned with something that invites us to a splendid future, something that brings us perpetual intimations of unlimited powers latent in man, something that is indicated to us, in scripture and tradition, by a mythology of transcendence.

And her contemporaries, such as Frazer and Freud, in seeking also to interpret the fluidic, non-rational, motivating element in human life, were concerned with something that comes from a primitive and even animal past, something that gives us perpetual reminders of the rather squalid limitations of human intelligence, something that is indicated to us by a mythology of primitive instinct.

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<sup>5</sup> *The Secret Doctrine*, i, 230

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 95

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 230

But there is this further difference between Madame Blavatsky and her contemporaries. She included their field of interpretation, and they did not include hers. She admitted the existence of that primitive and instinctual basis for human motivation and mythology with which they were concerned, while they did not concede the transcendent basis with which she was concerned. She included the essential features of their findings in her more comprehensive view of nature and the meaning of life. They did not include her conception in theirs, for which omission they are not, of course, in any way to be blamed, for they were writing with methods and objectives quite different from hers.

## V

### INSTINCT AND INTUITION

Madame Blavatsky dealt really with two mythologies, a transcendent and intuitive mythology of our future and a primitive and instinctual mythology of our past. And those two mythologies to a large extent employ the same symbols. As she showed, a particular popular myth in nearly any country or tradition could be interpreted in its transcendent sense as a revelation of the most exalted potentialities of active creative intelligence in man and nature, or it could be interpreted as a revelation of the reactive cravings and esurient instincts of animal man.

In fact it is as if, in dwelling here in our little rational world, we are beset from two directions by the forces of the great non-rational outside universe. Out of our past come the forces of instinct. Out of our future come the forces of what we may call intuition. Both are non-rational, but in a very different way.

The instinctive promptings are non-rational, in that they just do not take account of the rational mind. They are sub-rational. The intuitive promptings are non-rational in that they comprehend the rational mind within something larger than itself and are not limited by it. They are supra-rational.

That is not to say that intuition does not need the rational mind. There has to be a mind before intuition can transmute it into "illuminated mind." Without rational mind, as Madame Blavatsky says, "Atma-Buddhi is irrational on this plane and cannot act."<sup>8</sup> But when rational mind is illumined by the higher intuitive non-rational, by the supra-rational, it is enhanced and transcended.

When, however, rational mind is in thrall to the lower non-rational, to the sub-rational, to what is called *kama* in *The Secret Doctrine*, then it is motivated and agitated by something which is really irrelevant to reason. The reasons presented by such a

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., i, 288. Cf. also Josephine Ransom, *Studies in the Secret Doctrine*, p. 170

mind are only pretexts; for it has simply been given the task of making up excuses for whatever the reactive or instinctive sub-rational element wants to do, and it becomes an instrument through which reverberates “the roaring voice of the great illusion.”<sup>9</sup>

The minds of a large part of humanity are still being operated mainly in that way. We have constantly to distinguish between the apparently rational acts and objective statements with which people present us and a dark surging substratum of irrational emotive forces which underlie that apparently reasonable surface of word and deed. Most people are hardly conscious of the extent to which sub-rational emotive impulses rule their lives; and if this disturbing fact is demonstrated to them it often gives rise to that typical instinctive and sub-rational defensive reaction which we call indignation.

In practical experience it seems unlikely that we shall ever encounter human mind entirely pure and unaffected by either kind of non-rational prompting. In that case we should have a stationary machine without any motive force to make it move and work. The cold, calculating and unemotional mind which is ascribed to some of the darker figures of history is only mind motivated by an immature or stunted or atrophied emotional nature. Often in such a case the highly developed mind of an adult is motivated by what is really the equivalent of the emotional nature of a self-centered small child.

A great difficulty, and, in some cases, a great trial of integrity, lies in the fact that these two kinds of prompting from outside the world of rational mind—instinctive and intuitive or sub-rational and supra-rational—find expression in practically the same myths and symbols.

The reason why the same imagery, myths and symbols can refer either to the instinctive or to the intuitive side of nature, whether in dreams or folklore or works of fiction or in everyday life, lies in the similarity which is to be found between the path of forthgoing and the path of return. The two paths in evolution can be thought of as forming two halves of a great arc which runs from unconscious perfection, through conscious imperfection, to conscious perfection.

The image of a rope, which is used in a well-known essay on “Karma,”<sup>10</sup> gives a good idea of this. There, the individual existence is compared to a rope stretching from the infinite to the infinite. At first the rope runs with its component threads straight, level and colorless. Then it begins to become disordered. In fact it has reached the human kingdom, the phase of conscious imperfection. But finally, after much stress and disorder, the rope is at last again restored to harmony; and now the threads are no longer colorless but golden.

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<sup>9</sup> *The Voice of the Silence*, Fragment I

<sup>10</sup> Usually printed with *Light on the Path*

Holding that image in mind, we might think of the mythic pattern of life as representing a cross section of that rope made at any place along it. That cross section will be much the same, whether it is made at the colorless part of the rope, representing the instinctual phase of life, or at the golden part of the rope, representing the intuitive phase.

When we encounter a symbol or a myth, in drama or in art, in religion or in our personal lives, we have to discover whether it is evoking in us a response from the reactive, sub-rational self of our past or from the golden, supra-rational, intuitive self of our future.

## VI

### THE GODDESS: AN AMBIVALENT SYMBOL

For the sake of illustrating the ambivalent character of symbols, we can briefly consider one very prominent symbol. Madame Blavatsky's first important contribution to the literature of modern theosophy was a book about a goddess. In the actual text of *Isis Unveiled* there is, of course, very little mention made of the goddess; but the choice of title is significant in the light of the task which Madame Blavatsky performed in re-interpreting the non-rational side of life.

One of the most powerful of all symbols in mythology, art, literature, religion or dream life—to say nothing of everyday personal relationships—is the symbol of a woman or goddess. We meet this symbol of the woman in many different forms—as the distant princess for whom we long, as the sleeping beauty who will waken at a kiss, as the lovely maiden imprisoned in a tower in a dark forest, as a shepherdess of sheep, as a protecting mother, as a wise old nurse, as an elfin child, as a Circe who turns men into swine, as a goddess in armor like Athene. Sometimes we find her qualities transferred to some other symbol not of human form. Very often that symbol is a star.

Etymologically the word “symbol” means a throwing together, a concentration. Sometimes people use what they call a symbol as a means of analysis, a label or a category. For example, members of this Society sometimes offer interpretations of works of literature, showing that such and such a character in the story symbolizes such and such a principle of man's inner nature.<sup>11</sup> The compilation of stories with a deliberate view to subsequent symbolic moralizing was a practice in certain circles in later Roman times, and its products were caustically described by Gibbon as “the dotage of Platonic paganism.” But whether well done or not, such exercises in the interpretation of the symbolic content of events or works of literature are rather

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<sup>11</sup> A vivid example is Mabel Collins, *The Idyll of the White Lotus*, interpreted in *The Story of Sensa*.

mental; and a true symbol, appreciated as such, is intensely alive, has a powerful emotive impact, and can often become bodied forth in a living person.

Even in its more fanciful expressions, this goddess symbol can become objectified more easily than many might imagine. For example, in many tales of knights errant or wanderers or picaresque traveling heroes, the traveler has a disturbing encounter with a goddess or a fairy lady or some equivalent figure on a hillslope or mountainside. That happens very often in quite a personal and outer and everyday fashion when people have set out upon the path of occult aspiration. As they tread the upward path, they become emotionally involved with somebody in such a way as to bring to the surface a great mass of unresolved conflict in their natures; and sometimes they disastrously fail to deal with the situation and are left, like a certain symbolic figure in literature, "alone and palely loitering," a failure in two worlds, at least for the time being.

It has thus to be appreciated that real symbols are concentrations of emotive power and not just mental concepts.

Whether we encounter the goddess in religion, in dreams, in art or literature or in daily life, our response will be largely non-rational. And the crucial question is whether that non-rational response is to be from the instinctual aspect of the non-rational in us or from the intuitive. Is the symbol going to serve as a target for possessive sub-rational craving or is it going to serve as an inspiration and a guiding light to lead us into a more comprehensively intuitive knowledge of the unity which underlies all this diversity?

In some cases the symbol is presented in literature in a way that could make either response seem appropriate. In some oriental religious works the ambivalence with which the symbol is presented seems, to the westerner at least, to be extreme.<sup>12</sup> In other cases the symbol is so presented that it would seem difficult to respond to it at a low or merely reactive level. In *The Book of the Wisdom of Solomon* she figures as wisdom and "is the breath of the power of God and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty; therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God and the image of His goodness."

But what is significant is not so much the nobility with which the goddess is here represented, as our attitude towards her; for, even when so represented as to symbolize the purest wisdom and serve as the object of the purest devotion and aspiration, the goddess—Isis, Kwan-Yin, the Star of the Sea, or however she may be

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<sup>12</sup> E.g., Arthur and Ellen Avalon, *Hymns to the Goddess translated from the Sanskrit*, London, 1923

represented—could still be made the symbolic objective of separative, reactive and selfish desire of a refined kind.

## VII

### MYTH AND THE MODERN CRISIS

Whenever she treats of myths and theological symbols, Madame Blavatsky is keenly awake to the fact that these symbols can be given significance either at the reactive, sub-rational and instinctual level or at the active, intuitive and transcendent level. Nearly all her contemporaries saw them as significant at the reactive level only.

Of course Madame Blavatsky was not alone in seeing a cosmic and transcendent aspect to mythology. Long before her day, and in spite of the Age of Reason, the brothers Grimm and other romantic students of folklore had glimpsed this significance to the extent of recognizing something of the intuitive reflected in the instinctual. Jakob Grimm had written, "I do not regard the fabulous as fancy, illusion and falsehood, but as downright divine truth.... All mythologies are ultimately descended from one, true and divine." And the younger brother, Wilhelm, in introducing the second edition of the famous *Tales*, wrote, "What are here preserved are thoughts on the divine and spiritual element in late, ancient belief and doctrine bodied forth, dipped in the epic medium that evolves with the history of a people."<sup>13</sup> Although less self-consciously concerned with what is mythic, Wordsworth's interpretation of simple country people had the same idea behind it. And today, at the level of the personal myth, many psychologists, of whom Jung is the most eminent, see the non-rational mythic and symbolic element in our lives as not merely a record of our reactive and instinctual past but also as a promise of our creative and intuitive future.

Madame Blavatsky, however, developed this subject much further than any others have done, and she was very keenly aware of the ease with which the selfish and prudential instincts of humanity could degrade the most refined and lofty symbols. Much of her indignation or her sardonic wit was spent on those who were guilty of this degradation, who had given that which is holy to the dogs.

Thus she wrote with severity of the Roman Catholic Church because it had degraded the mythic element and the symbolism of its faith to satisfy the instinctual possessive demand for comfort or gratification or power. And she took a very adverse view of the Jewish influence upon Christian theology. She often referred to Jehovah as a "phallic" deity,<sup>14</sup> meaning that he had been given significance at a merely reactive

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<sup>13</sup> While the field of politics must be left-as beyond the scope of this study, it may be noted that this idea of an intuitive wisdom emerging through the instinctive reactions of common people (summed up in the aphorism "*Vox populi vox Dei*") had a large influence upon nineteenth-century liberal and democratic thinking.

<sup>14</sup> *The Secret Doctrine*, i, 71 sq., iv, 40

level. She used the word “phallic” in a sense very much wider than the usual dictionary sense of that word, implying by it, not just a sexual cult, but a cult based on the whole instinctual and reactive side of life. And it was a product of universal and transcendent truths becoming degraded. “Phallic worship,” she wrote, “has developed only with the loss of the keys to the true meaning of the symbols. It was the last and most fatal turning from the highway of truth and divine knowledge into the side path of fiction, raised into dogma through human falsification and hierarchic ambition.”<sup>15</sup>

Much that she wrote about the interpretation of symbols at levels below the intuitive and the transcendental has a very important bearing upon what is happening in our own time. In the present period of history the Age of Reason has run its course and people are turning much more sympathetically towards the non-rational elements in life. Part of the crisis of this age is bound up with the question as to whether the sympathies of the more advanced and intelligent portions of humanity can be won to an intuitive response to the non-rational rather than to an instinctual and reactive response. Is the non-rational, towards which we are turning, going to be the supra-rational or merely the sub-rational? After an Age of Reason the non-rational has once more come flooding irrevocably into our lives; and we may so respond to it that rational mind may be gradually transformed into “illuminated mind,” or we may become the reactive slaves of our past in a way likely to produce such disasters as have never threatened humanity before.

The unrestrained play of sub-rational forces in a human world can be a frightening spectacle, but particularly so if the spectator is also agitated by those same forces acting within his own personality. Perhaps our first impulse is to want to rush out and expostulate with such a world, preach to it, reorganize it and perhaps denounce it. But, to help the world, we have to perform a supra-rational task—to attain within ourselves that “windless place” where the lamp “flickereth not,”<sup>16</sup> whence we can, though still personally vulnerable, survey and fully understand that play of forces.<sup>17</sup> It is within and through ourselves that the world is to be changed and saved, not only by an external reorganization and the bringing of the old forces and factors into fresh juxtapositions. And there are as many ways of changing the world through our own natures as there are varieties of human temperament.

One of Madame Blavatsky’s great successors as a teacher in this Society, our late President, Mr. Jinarajadasa, made it peculiarly his business to point to art and an impersonal love of beauty as an ideal means of transmuting the instinctual into the intuitive. In the present swing of public feeling towards the non-rational, the reactive

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 308

<sup>16</sup> *Bhagavad-Gita*, tr. Annie Besant and Bhagavan Das, vi, 19

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv, 23

and sub-rational side of life has claimed the devotion of many, even in the arts; and, in the event, the references which another of our past Presidents, Dr. Arundale, used to make to “black” art, “black” music, and many other backward-facing tendencies in this present age, seem only too fully justified.

Ceremony also is a method of transmutation and is directly concerned with traditional symbols. But here again, while great things can be achieved, the symbols can also be dragged down and can become objectives of instinctual ambition. Invoking glamorous concentrations of emotive power, ceremonialists can easily surrender themselves to the sub-rational.

There is no method for transmuting instinct into intuition, reactivity into creativeness, and for passing on from rational mind to illumined mind, which is not wholly dependent upon individual integrity.

## VIII

### FROM RATIONAL MIND TO ILLUMINED MIND

These contemporary problems must frequently arise in the private lives of members of the Theosophical Society, for a turn taken in an occult direction often cuts people off from the conventional contemporary means to emotional fulfillment and demands an entirely new attitude towards the non-rational side of life, the lyrical side of life, if such people are neither to become desiccated and frustrated nor to react into instinctual outlets. A strong glowing response in terms of completely impersonal love and appreciation is a safe non-rational response; but when this is not achieved, various problems arise.

Often, being careful of ourselves and feeling unable to make that positive and intuitive response, we set the rational mind and memory to act as watchdog over the heart. This is probably not wholly avoidable; but that method of setting the mind to limit the activity of the heart is a denial of the truth that the heart has its reasons of which the mind can know nothing. It also involves great tension and unhappiness and it causes ill health. It can also break down, causing a sudden sub-rational reaction into the thralldom of the instinctual side of life.

Another device which many people adopt for the sake of safety in dealing with the non-rational is a form of sentimentality in which emotion is allowed to run along parallel to a strong vein of selfish prudential calculation which keeps the emotion substantially dissociated from any kind of action in a real human world. Sooner or later some incident usually brings about a greater or less degree of revelation of the falsity of this.

Madame Blavatsky was a lively critic of these devices and forms of humbug; and, even if we sometimes depend upon them as temporary expedients, it is clearly better that all such devices should be swept away as soon as possible by a positive response in which mind and heart are at one.

The weakness of efforts to achieve psychological stability by methods of adjustment and of counterchecking and counterbalancing lies in the fact that they tend to deny the splendid comprehensiveness and oneness of intuitive vision. They divide life, which to the eye of intuition is one, into compartments and pieces.

And here it should be said that intuition and instinct may be convenient labels to indicate two kinds of response; but they are not themselves opposites, the one good and the other bad.

Intuition, in Madame Blavatsky's words, "soars above the tardy processes of ratiocination"<sup>18</sup> and in this sense is non-rational or supra-rational; but it also includes and comprehends reason. It transcends, transmutes and illumines reason and does not obliterate it or oppose it. Similarly it includes and comprehends those automatic processes of life which we call instinctive. It does not obliterate them. It gives them their right place and significance, so that they become a harmonious factor in our lives and not a source of conflict.

In *The Secret Doctrine* the awakening of the illumined mind, the higher mind, is described as the task of "Solar Angels," who are also referred to under various other names.<sup>19</sup> The functioning of instinct in our lives is ascribed to forces that are lunar. Our problem is not just a choice between sunlight and moonlight. It is rather a matter of giving to direct light and to reflected light their true respective values in the whole scheme of things.

Illumined mind is not involved in a perpetual oscillation between calculated choices. The liberation which illumination brings is often described as "choiceless."

## IX

### PURPOSE BEYOND SYMBOLS

So far, in this survey of the search for purpose in the non-rational realms of life, we have not gone beyond what might be called the first layer of the non-rational world. It is the layer which can be known to reason through the patterned imprint which it makes upon the rational world in terms of myth and symbol. But to know Purpose itself we must go beyond myth and symbol.

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<sup>18</sup> *The Secret Doctrine*, i, 69

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 97

The student of *The Secret Doctrine* will notice that that work provides a picture of a kind of hierarchy of myths and symbols. The mythologies of many lands and ages are surveyed and pared; but, when matters closer to the heart of purpose are being referred to, certain higher and over-riding symbols are used, particularly those that are in the Stanzas of Dzyan. Thus, for example, the parental functions of gods and goddesses are merged in a single symbol—“Father-Mother.” And even among such symbols there are a few, more comprehensive in intention, which are used here and there where certain high peaks of purpose are to be indicated.

Is it not possible in reading some passages of the world’s great Scriptures of Purpose to bring to them more than our merely mechanically rational minds and to enter a little into their atmosphere and their poetry—not poetry in any sense of a formal slice out of the cake of literature, but a poetry which may use words and yet is altogether beyond words, a rare fragrance from those higher altitudes?

No help can be given or received by explanation or commentary. A leap must be taken by each alone if there is to be this understanding. Behind certain passages and symbols there is a deep that calls to deep. If we are shallow we do not hear. But the whole message of *The Secret Doctrine* is that we do not need to be shallow, that there is no limit to the depth and comprehensiveness that lie potential behind our human nature.

In the little glimpses and intimations that we may receive of underlying Purpose, through studies and meditations upon certain stanzas or symbols, through communion with nature, or in other ways, there is a tremendous austere exhilaration. Such a glimpse or intimation must have something of the character of mystical experience. A true mystical experience is not vague and indefinite but has an intense, knife-edge clarity, conveys a delight that is, as it were, clean and hard and tangible in its vitality and power. For, though it is an experience of a universal Reality, it yet finds a perfect expression within that particular microcosm which is the life of the individual.

But we tend to shrink back; for such intimations begin to make us aware of the *awful* mystery of the utter oneness of life. To us it is an awful mystery because it is destructive of every assumption and every relationship upon which our lives and our civilization are based in this external world of manyness. In the presence of that mystery, all that we, as separate beings, rely upon is gone. There is no resistance, no adversary; and the wings of our pride flutter helplessly in a vacuum.

Yet, in shrinking back, we may discover that there is really nothing and nowhere to shrink back to. For that Unity, that Purpose, has no opposite. Nothing is in contrast to that Purpose or antithetical to It; nor is It antithetical to love or reason or intuition or

instinct or anything else—though, as divisions of experience, these may well, when all is One, cease to be as we know them.

## X

### PURITY OF PURPOSE

With the extending contemporary discovery of the non-rational in terms of pattern and with a growing appreciation of the symbolic content of all relationships and experiences, the modern world is busy evolving new and valuable sciences of relationship, sciences of adjustment. But may it not be that those of us who are concerned more with things still latent and unexplained can look beyond this to a science not of adjustment but of Purpose?

Thus, for example, when some disaster overtakes us, we strive to solve the problem by smoothing it out through some form of adjustment; but, if we could know that disaster, that problem, as *karma*, as a pure and immediate embodiment of Purpose, there would then be a flash of recognition from this to That, from the alone to the Alone. Fulfillment would then be our first objective, not adjustment. Such adjustment as fulfillment might impel us to make would be very different from the adjustment that arises from the wish to smooth away an immediate personal difficulty; and the solution of a problem through the recognition and fulfillment of the ultimate purpose which it embodies would be profound, lasting and sure.

For those who seek to know and to fulfill Purpose and who are impatient of unreality and lack of purpose, Madame Blavatsky has recorded what has to be done.

“Let them know at once and remember always,” she wrote, “that true Occultism or Theosophy is the ‘Great Renunciation of Self,’ unconditionally and absolutely, in thought as in action. It is altruism, and it throws him who practices it out of calculation of the ranks of the living altogether. ‘Not for himself but for the world he lives,’ as soon as he has pledged himself to the work. Much is forgiven during the first years of probation. But no sooner is he ‘accepted’ than his personality must disappear, and he has to become a mere beneficent force in Nature.”<sup>20</sup>

We are the heirs of Madame Blavatsky—not the inheritors only of her literary relics but also of her responsibilities. What she made available to the world has been profoundly creative, but it has also met with responses that are merely reactive, sometimes destructively reactive. Since her day, for example, the fair name of occultism has been brought low indeed by many meretricious associations and abuses.

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<sup>20</sup> “Occultism versus the Occult Arts” in *Practical Occultism*, Adyar, 1939, p. 50 sq.

Purpose is the only true criterion of what is real theosophy. Purpose alone displays the insignificance of futile things and reveals the true majesty of the things that are great. Purpose alone makes occultism clean. To know and to fulfill Purpose is the only way in which we can fulfil our trust to Those who have shown us light.