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IS THEOSOPHY TOO ABSTRACT?

One of the common complaints from those encountering Theosophy for the first time is that our literature is too abstract. "Of what practical use is it? How is it relevant to my life?" Because these questions have merit, Theosophical journals often feature articles explaining the application of Theosophical principles to daily life. Yet there is something to be said in defense of the abstract nature of much of our literature. Reading abstruse passages from *The Secret Doctrine*, for example, challenges our mental faculties in ways to which we may be unaccustomed. That part of our mind that deals with empirical data is quite different from the part that comprehends universal principles, and both aspects are necessary.

Modern science uses the inductive method of investigation, but Madame Blavatsky reminds us that the deductive method was the preferred mode of inquiry for Initiates:

It must be remembered that the study of Occultism proceeds from Universals to Particulars, and not the reverse, as accepted by Science. As Plato was an Initiate, he very naturally used the former method, while Aristotle, never having been initiated, scoffed at his master, and, elaborating a system of his own, left it as an heirloom to be adopted and improved by [Francis] Bacon (*Collected Writings* 12:599).

Whereas the Initiates concerned themselves with a few universal truths, the modern scientist deals with a plethora of facts in the hope of arriving at truth. In his book *Man, God and the Universe*, I. K. Taimni argues that it is easier to deal with a few abstract principles than with an endless stream of facts and data:

Once we have derived or discovered a principle by correct and reliable methods we can depend upon it under all kinds of circumstances. But when we are dealing with a mass of detailed facts we are liable to trip any moment. The reason for this is obvious. All principles and relations exist in the realm of the Universal Mind as eternal verities and are not subject to change or modification. The phenomena, on the other hand, form a flowing stream every part of which is changing all the time.

Because of the ephemeral nature of the phenomenal world, methods of practical application need to be modified as circumstances change. Nothing in this world remains the same, even for an instant. As sailors of old set their gaze on the polestar above in order to navigate the restless ocean below, students of the ageless wisdom fix their sights on the eternal verities as they traverse the ever-changing and sometimes tumultuous sea of life. What can be more practical than that?

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