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A REFLECTION ON *THE SECRET DOCTRINE*, No. 2

It may surprise you to learn that Theosophical literature contains some scary words, at least according to some people. One of those frightening words is *hierarchy*; another is *doctrine*. I'll deal with the former at a future date, but for now, let's consider the latter.

Why, you might ask, would the word *doctrine* make some people uneasy? It's a two-syllable word and it's not one of those hard-to-pronounce Sanskrit terms found in *The Secret Doctrine* like *Svabhavat* or *Manu-Svâyambhuva*. Perhaps the words *hierarchy* and *doctrine* don't intimidate you. That's good. They don't cause me to break out in a cold sweat either, but then I'm a 3rd degree black belt with years of training in the martial arts.

Still, some Theosophists harbor a visceral dislike for certain words. I'll give you one example. Years ago a member of the Milwaukee Lodge expressed his discomfort to me over the word *doctrine*. He mischievously threatened to get a custom-made bumper sticker reading "My dogma ran over your doctrine."

And therein lies the crux of the matter, namely that some people equate doctrine with dogma. The truth is that doctrines do not become dogma without an element of coercion. When people are forced to accept an idea or concept without the ability to question or interpret, the result is dogma. Religions have done that. Some still do. By contrast, Theosophy has a number of metaphysical doctrines which are not, and should not, be presented in a dogmatic way. Theosophists are free to accept or reject them as they see fit.

Emily Sellon, a brilliant student of Theosophy, wrote this about Theosophical doctrines in the July 1983 issue of *The American Theosophist*: "These are not dogmas designed to tell us how to think, but guidelines to keep us from getting lost in the wilderness of contemporary information and opinion." Rightly understood, a well-articulated doctrine serves as a beacon of light that guides our quest for understanding. Dogma, however, shackles the mind and results in a state of intellectual darkness and paralysis. Now that's scary!

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