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## A REFLECTION ON *THE SECRET DOCTRINE*, No. 5

“How little do we know that which we are! How less what we may be!” These lines from Byron’s “Don Juan” are as true today as when they were first published in the 1820s. Our sense of identity is formed by many factors—our parents, the prevailing culture, the media. No sensible person would deny the role these and other influences play in shaping our personalities. Yet to circumscribe our sense of self to the limited scope of empirical factors is to ignore our true essence. It’s like my saying I understand the ocean because I’ve skimmed its surface in a small boat.

There is a profound mystery at the core of our being, a mystery that cannot be discounted or diminished by all the statistics favored by scientists, psychologists, and sociologists. Their work is important; it has value and merit, but it doesn’t explain the mystery of our being. As William Wordsworth observed, “We feel that we are greater than we know.”

Consider this often quoted phrase from the third Fundamental Proposition of *The Secret Doctrine*: “The fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul.” The term “Over-Soul” appears in an essay published in 1841 by Emerson, in which he says: “It is undefinable, unmeasurable; but we know that it pervades and contains us.” If it cannot be measured or defined, then whatever this Over-Soul is would be, by definition, beyond the reach of scientific knowledge. Yet, Emerson claims we *know* of its presence. But how do we know this? We know this, not in the ordinary sense, such as knowing that two plus two equals four, but rather by an intuitive sensing.

And notice the choice of words used in the third Proposition. The relation of the Soul to the Over-Soul is characterized, not as a mere likeness, resemblance, or similarity, but as a *fundamental identity*. Consider for a moment the difference between sharing a similarity with something versus having a fundamental identity with it. An apple may resemble an orange in that they are both round and grow on trees, but nobody confuses the two.

To understand the nature of the ocean requires more than skimming its surface. Dwelling on our personality quirks and preferences is like skimming the surface of the ocean. To discover the mystery at the heart of our being, say the sages, requires diving into the depths of human consciousness. Then we may come to know that which we truly are.

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