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## A REFLECTION ON *THE SECRET DOCTRINE*, No. 22

The sight of the sun rising in the east and setting in the west; the sound of a train whistle dropping in pitch as the locomotive rushes past; the sense of a chair or table or plate as being solid; all these are easily recognized as sensory illusions. We know the appearance of the sun traversing the sky to be an optical illusion; the precipitous drop in pitch of a passing locomotive whistle to be an auditory illusion; and the seeming solidity of physical objects to be an aggregate of atoms and molecules consisting mostly of empty space.

Other illusions are not so easily discerned, especially those of a psychological nature, e.g., the belief that our perceptions of other people constitute reality; the notion that fame and celebrity have intrinsic value; the assumption that wealth leads to happiness; or the tendency to elevate our personal opinions to the level of indisputable fact. The human condition is one that is subject to illusions of various kinds, many of which we are blissfully unaware.

“From the stand-point of the highest metaphysics,” according to *The Secret Doctrine*, “the whole Universe, gods included, is an illusion.” This is the much misunderstood doctrine of Māyā, an integral part of the Esoteric Philosophy. The word *māyā* comes from the Sanskrit root *mā*, which means “to measure” or “mark off.” To say that the universe is a *māyā* is not to say that it doesn’t exist. In this case, “temporary appearance” might be a better rendition than “illusion.” Judith Tyberg defines *māyā* as “that which limits or circumscribes, and prevents us from cognizing perfect Truth or Reality, which is beyond limits, boundless. Māyā is the inevitable result of manifestation because matter of any kind is a veil which hides Reality. The thicker the veil, the greater the Māyā.”

The Universe is called, with everything in it, MĀYĀ, because all is temporary therein, from the ephemeral life of a firefly to that of the Sun . . . Yet, the Universe is real enough to the conscious beings in it, which are as unreal as it is itself. (*S.D.* 1:274)

This is what may be called the cosmological interpretation of Māyā, a doctrine of great profundity and multiple levels of meaning, which will become clearer to the earnest student as he or she patiently reflects on such statements, allowing the intellect to be guided by the sure light of the intuitive faculty.

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