

AN INTRODUCTION TO
ESOTERIC PRINCIPLES

FOURTH EDITION

A Study Course
by
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Dedication:

To the treasured memory of
John Posey, Theosophist and Unknown Philosopher

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Abide With Me

Abide with me, Thou Atmic Ray Divine,
And shed Thy Light upon this soul of mine;
I have no hope, no source of light but Thee;
O Thou, possessing all, abide with me.

When sickness rages, clouds around me throng,
Be this my consolation and my song:
“The Lord of Light, can ne’er unfaithful be,
And this great King of Kings abides with me.”

I fear not what this world may do or say;
I only fear the foe that doth betray—
My lower self, that shrinks away from Thee—
But thou art patient, Lord; abide with me.

I ask not ease, immunity from pain;
For discipline, I know, is always gain;
But sometimes, Lord, unveil and smile on me,
Unworthy though I am; Abide with me.

Thus through all ills, all sorrows, sickness, pain,
Thy hand shall guide, my lower self restrain;
And daily shall this prayer arise to Thee:
“Oh King of Peace, my God, abide with me.”

—Wilton Hack
The Theosophist
June 1899

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PREFACE

One of the most difficult tasks before the student of Theosophy is to bridge the gap between the elementary and the more advanced studies. Our literature contains many examples of both extremes, but there are relatively few presentations which attempt to lead the student across the abyss which separates the two. An attempt has been made in this work to aid in bridging this abyss to some extent. It is assumed that the reader has read or studied some of the available Theosophical literature and has tried—perhaps he or she may think unsuccessfully—to read some of the more difficult works. It is hoped that this guide for study will provide at least the fundamentals which will prepare the student to tackle the more advanced materials, to wrestle with the perplexing questions contained therein, and to form his or her own opinions intelligently. Knotty philosophical problems and difficult points in the teaching have been dealt with as well as some of the less technical aspects.

It seems necessary to point out with complete honesty and candor those points where later writers seem to be at variance with or diverge from the teaching given by H. P. Blavatsky and the Masters of Wisdom in the early days of the Theosophical Society. To do so is to lay oneself open to the charge of setting up HPB as an authority. On that point, the writer can only plead guilty and beg for mercy.

The writer also begs forgiveness for diverging from the teaching in those places where his own understanding is imperfect. Such is the curse which falls upon the heads of those of us who presume to write about Theosophy without ourselves being, as HPB was, the direct amanuensis of the Mahatmas.

Each time this study manual has been reprinted, I have been tempted to make all sorts of changes to reflect my changing understanding over the years. Such an extensive revision would involve altering and expanding the text so greatly that it would no longer serve the purpose for which it was written. I have therefore contented myself with a minimum number of changes in hopes that the guide will continue to be useful to a certain class of students. This time around I am particularly grateful to David Bruce and Nicholas Weeks for reviewing the manuscript and making suggestions for its improvement.

William Doss McDavid
San Antonio, TX 2008

Chapter 1

Schools of Esoteric Teaching

Theosophy has been called the Wisdom Religion. The word stems from the Greek words “theos” (God) and “sophia” (Wisdom) and refers to the “Wisdom of the Gods.” This Divine Wisdom, tradition relates, was brought to earth in the infancy of humanity by a superhuman race, the leaders of which have been remembered as the gods and legendary heroes of mythology. It was these great beings who taught humanity its first lessons in science, art, and philosophy and who laid the foundations for world culture.

It is said that the Divine Wisdom was taught openly to the first human races. It was only during the time of the fourth, or Atlantean, race that it became hidden from the sight of the majority. The reason for this secrecy was explained by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in the following words:

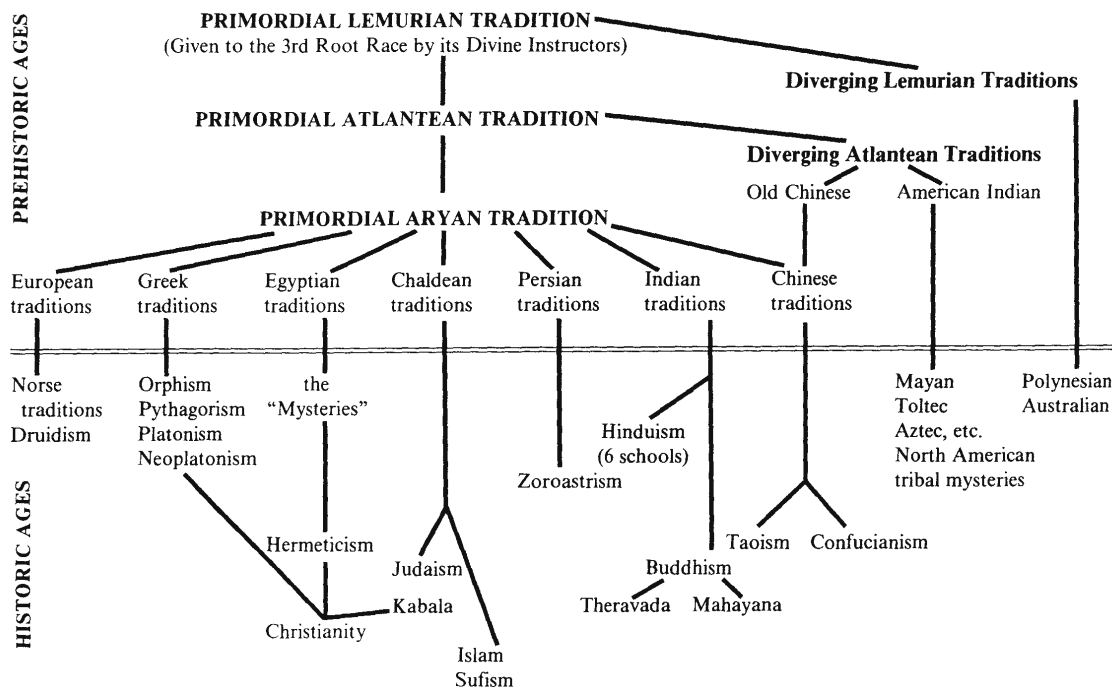
The first, semi-divine, pure and spiritual Races of Humanity . . . had the “truths of God,” and lived up to them, and their ideals. They preserved them, as long as there was hardly any evil, and hence scarcely a possible abuse of that knowledge and those truths. But evolution and the gradual fall into materiality is also one of the “truths” and also one of the laws of “God.” And as mankind progressed, and became with every generation more of the earth, earthly, the individuality of each temporary Ego began to assert itself. It is personal selfishness that develops and urges man on to the abuse of his knowledge and power. And selfishness is a human building, whose windows and doors are forever wide open for every kind of iniquity to enter man’s soul . . . Hence the necessity of gradually taking away from man the divine knowledge and power, which became with every new human cycle more dangerous as a double-edged weapon, whose evil side was ever threatening one’s neighbor, and whose power for good was lavished freely only upon self. Those few “elect” whose inner natures had remained unaffected by their outward physical growth, thus became in time the sole guardians of the mysteries revealed, passing the knowledge to those most fit to receive it. (*Collected Writings*, 14:40-41)

Thus from those days were established the Mystery Schools in which the Wisdom Teachings were preserved for the worthy.

In the early days of this present fifth or Aryan race, the predominant seat of civilization was in Central Asia. It was there that the parent school, the chief and oldest of the Mystery Schools, was maintained. As the Aryans spread throughout the ancient world, the Initiates among them established esoteric schools in all the greatest centers of civilization. It was under the direction of these Initiates that many of the temples and monuments of antiquity were built. Often, the Aryans spread into regions where races

of Atlantean descent were practicing their own forms of esotericism. Mingling with the older races, the Aryan Initiates established schools of the mysteries adapted to the cultural and social conditions in which they found themselves. Thus the Wisdom Religion, which was one in its foundations, became differentiated into innumerable traditions. The ancient Brahmanical religion of India was the form which it assumed as the Aryans swept southward across the Himalayas. In Persia, it became the religion of the Magi, which was later to become the Parsi faith under the reforming influence of Zoroasters. In Egypt, building upon foundations laid by the Atlanteans, the King-Initiates taught the Wisdom Religion in the seclusion of pyramids and imposing temples that remain to this day architectural wonders. Figure 1 suggests the diffusion of the primordial Wisdom-Tradition resulting in the proliferation of schools of esoteric thought.

Figure 1



Throughout the ancient world, therefore, the Initiates established Mystery Schools for the worthy while, around these, popular religions full of myth and superstition developed among the multitudes. As civilization declined and mankind entered the Dark Age or Kali Yuga, as it is sometimes called, the esoteric schools became more secret and hidden from sight until their very existence passed from the public eye. This was especially true in Western lands where the intolerance of the Roman Catholic Church made it necessary for the Initiates to hide altogether from public scrutiny. Secret societies, such as the Rosicrucian Order and the Masonic fraternities, preserved the

teachings of the Wisdom Religion throughout the Middle Ages and down to the present time.

A reform movement, encompassing all traditional esoteric orders the world over, was initiated around the time of the Lord Gautama Buddha and was brought to fruition during the life of the Tibetan teacher Tsong-kha-pa in the fourteenth century. A. P. Sinnett described this effort in the following words:

Adeptship, when Buddha incarnated, was not the condensed, compact hierarchy that it has since become under his influence. There has never been an age of the world without its adepts; but they have sometimes been scattered throughout the world; they have sometimes been isolated in separate seclusions; they have gravitated now to this country, now to that; and finally, be it remembered, their knowledge and power has not always been inspired with that elevated and sincere morality which Buddha infused into its latest and highest organization. The reform of the occult world by his instrumentality was, in fact, the result of his great sacrifice, of the self-denial which induced him to reject the blessed condition of Nirvana to which, after his earth-life as Buddha, he was fully entitled, and undertake the burden of renewed incarnations¹ in order to carry out more thoroughly the task he had taken in hand, and confer a correspondingly increased benefit on mankind. (*Esoteric Buddhism*, pp. 132-133)

His third appearance was in the person of Tsong-kha-pa,² the great Tibetan adept reformer of the fourteenth century. In this personality he was exclusively concerned with the affairs of the adept fraternity, by that time collecting chiefly in Tibet. From time immemorial there had been a certain secret region in Tibet, which to this day is quite unknown to and unapproachable by any but initiated persons, and inaccessible to the ordinary people of the country as to any others. But the country generally was not in Buddha's time, as it has since become,³ the chosen habitation of the great brotherhood. Much more than they are at present, were the Mahatmas in former times distributed about the world. The progress of civilization, engendering the magnetism they find so trying, had, however, by the date with which we are now dealing—the fourteenth century—already given rise to a very general movement toward Tibet on the part of the previously dissociated occultists. Far more widely than was held consistent with the safety of mankind was occult knowledge and power then found to be disseminated. To

¹ We are treading here upon very sacred territory. A few hints on Buddha's subsequent "incarnations" are given in "The Mystery of Buddha" and "'Reincarnations' of Buddha" in the so-called third volume of *The Secret Doctrine* (See *Collected Writings*, 14: 388-407).

² This is not quite correct as there were other manifestations of the Buddha unknown to Mr. Sinnett when he wrote *Esoteric Buddhism* (see "'Reincarnations' of Buddha").

³ This was written in 1883. HPB reportedly told James Morgan Pryse in 1890 that the Masters had begun to withdraw from Tibet ("Truth and Honesty," *The Canadian Theosophist* 12, July 1931: 139).

the task of putting it under the control of a rigid system of rule and law did Tsong-kha-pa address himself.

Without re-establishing the system on the previous unreasonable basis of caste exclusiveness, he elaborated a code of rules for the guidance of the adepts, the effect of which was to weed out of the occult body all but those who sought occult knowledge in a spirit of the most sublime devotion to the highest moral principles. (Ibid., p. 138)

As a result of this reform, the secret orders recognized and presided over by the highest Initiates were unified and organized into a centralized federation and given some new directives for guiding their activities. (See *Theosophy*, January 1938). One of these directives obligated them to participate in a continuing effort that had been going on since the first century B.C.E. to restore the light of the mysteries to the Western world (*Collected Writings*, 12:120; 14:294-5). This effort is consistently made during the last quarter of every century. Describing this effort, H. P. Blavatsky wrote as follows:

Among the commandments of Tsong-kha-pa there is one that enjoins the Rahats (Arhats) to make an attempt to enlighten the world, including the "white barbarians," every century, at a certain specified period of the cycle. (*Collected Writings*, 14:431)

We may tabulate briefly some of the events which have occurred in the last quarter of each century from the fourteenth to this day in seeming fulfillment of this plan:

14 th century	"Foundation" of the fraternity of the Rosy Cross by Christian Rosenkreutz
15 th century	Work of the Florentine Platonic Academy Introduction of printing into Europe Columbus discovers the "new world" Birth of Paracelsus, the reformer of medicine
16 th century	Work of Akbar in India Publication of first "Shakespeare" plays Foundations laid for revival of Rosicrucian activity Giordano Bruno tries to reconcile Catholics and Protestants through Neoplatonism
17 th century	Publication of Newton's <i>Principia</i> Infancy of the Royal Society Establishment of the Rosicrucian Order in America
18 th century	Reform movements within Masonry led by Counts St. Germain and Cagliostro Magnetic healing taught by Mesmer

	Martinism established
	Birth of the United States of America
19 th century	Establishment of the Theosophical Society by Blavatsky, Olcott, and Judge Maha Bodhi Society founded Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn founded
20 th century	?????

The most significant of the nineteenth century efforts was carried on by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (HPB) with the assistance of Henry Steel Olcott, William Quan Judge, and others. It was the work of HPB to reveal a portion of the Wisdom Religion in a public manner never before attempted in recent centuries. Doctrines such as the seven-fold structure of the human constitution and the planetary system, reincarnation, karma, and spiritual evolution were given out for all to read. Citations were produced from the world's sacred literature to back up the claims made on behalf of the Wisdom Religion. The personality and work of several of the great Initiates were made known to the public, and communications from them were made known and circulated. The qualifications and guidelines for those desiring to set their feet on the path of psychic and spiritual development were set forth.

It is perhaps too early to evaluate the efforts of the twentieth century but the worldwide influence of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and other Mahayana Buddhist teachers seems worthy of notice. It is reasonable to assume that the help that we may hope to receive in the future will be dependent upon the degree to which we have been able to assimilate the teachings given in the preceding centuries. It is with the intention of providing a concise and compact, if regrettably incomplete, summary of the main points of this teaching that this study manual has been prepared.



REFERENCES FOR SUPPLEMENTARY READING:

Judge, *The Ocean of Theosophy*, ch. 1 "Theosophy and the Masters."

Knoche, *The Mystery Schools*.

Sinnett, *The Occult World*, ch. 1 "Occultism and Its Adepts."

———. *Esoteric Buddhism*, ch. 1 "Esoteric Teachers."

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

1. What do you think is meant by the term *Mystery School*?
2. Why was secrecy required in esoteric organizations during the Middle Ages?
3. What reform is the Buddha said to have made among the Initiates or Adepts?
4. Why is reform occasionally required, even within the occult brotherhoods? Is this a surprising idea to you?
5. What kind of risk do you think the Adepts were taking in founding the Theosophical Society?
6. How was the Ancient Wisdom brought to humanity? Describe in your own words the evolution of esoteric thought from prehistoric times to modern times.
7. Do you see any evidence that a new spiritual impulse took place during the closing years of the last century?
8. What are some of the ideas common to all the major religious traditions of the world?

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