

Introduction

Excerpted from

The Secret Gateway Modern Theosophy and the Ancient Wisdom Tradition

By Edward Abdill

Have you ever wondered *why*? Why is there so much sorrow and apparent injustice in the world? Why we cannot find permanent happiness? Perhaps such questions have caused you to question whether or not life has any meaning. Perhaps like most, you have decided that such questions can never be answered. Perhaps you are right — but then again, perhaps not.

Scientists have discovered that the objective world is governed by natural law. As a result, we know a great deal about matter and energy. Yet we know very little about the subjective side of our nature. Could it be that our emotions, thoughts, and spiritual nature are also governed by natural law? Current scientific method has been able to measure physical responses to emotion, but it cannot measure our hopes and dreams. It cannot measure consciousness.

There is a timeless tradition that illuminates some of the laws of the subjective nature and also addresses the question of *why*. It is found in human cultures all over the world from the earliest recorded history to the present. That tradition has been called by various names, such as the ancient wisdom and the perennial philosophy.

In the late nineteenth century, a remarkable woman named Helena Petrovna Blavatsky formulated a modern statement of the ancient wisdom tradition. She called it Theosophy. Blavatsky emphasized that she taught nothing new. Rather, she gathered together much of the wisdom of the past and presented it in modern language.

Here is one summation of Theosophy, adapted from a statement

published in each issue of the international journal *The Theosophist*:

Theosophy is not a religion. Rather, it is the body of truths that forms the basis of all religions, and which cannot be claimed as the exclusive possession of any. It offers a philosophy which renders life intelligible, and which demonstrates the justice and the love which guide its evolution. It puts death in its rightful place, as a recurring incident in an endless life, opening the gateway to a fuller and more radiant existence. It restores to

the world the Science of the Spirit, teaching us to know the Spirit as our self and the mind and body as our servants. It illuminates the scriptures and doctrines of religions by unveiling their hidden meanings, and thus justifying them at the bar of intelligence, as they are ever justified in the eyes of intuition. You need not reject your faith in order to become a Theosophist. Rather, you are asked to probe more deeply into your own faith, especially into its mystical traditions, and to try to live an altruistic life.

The ancient wisdom tradition could never be the exclusive property of any organization. To spread its teachings, however, it was necessary to form an organization. Therefore, in 1875 Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott, and others formed the Theosophical Society in New York City. At its founding the Society had only one object. It was “to collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe.” In a very real sense, that is still the only objective of the Theosophical Society, but it is now stated as three “objects” or objectives:

- To form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, cast or color.
- To encourage the comparative study of religion, philosophy, and science.
- To investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in humanity.

Implementing the second and third objectives is likely to lead to the discovery of natural laws that govern our mind and feelings. Moreover, we may discover that we are all made of the same stuff and that everything we do, think, and feel will affect the whole. We may realize that we are part of a universal brotherhood, and that may change the way we live.

We already know that despite the superficial cultural and genetic differences that divide us, we are remarkably homogeneous — physically, psychologically, intellectually, and spiritually. Biologically, we are a single human gene pool, with only minor local variations. Psychologically, we respond to pleasure and pain in the same way. Intellectually, we have the same curiosity about our place in the universe and the same power to discover truth. Spiritually, we have a common origin and a common destiny.

We are part and parcel of the totality of existence stretching from earth to the farthest reaches of the cosmos in every conceivable dimension. When we realize our integral connection with all other human beings, with all other life forms, with the most distant reaches of space, we will realize that we cannot either harm or help another without harming or helping ourselves. If we know this not only intellectually, but deep within the core of our being, then our whole lives will be transformed. Responding to others with violence will become unthinkable. Our lives will become harmonious, and our lost paradise will be restored.¹

¹ The previous two paragraphs have been adapted from the pamphlet *Theosophy: What Is It?*, published by the Theosophical Society in America.

While yet in a small minority, there are those in every culture who have realized ultimate unity. They are the saints and holy ones of humanity. They have shown us that such a realization is possible, and that it leads to a life of active altruism. In time, and with a deep longing to understand our place in the world, we may become like them.

The aspiration of the true Theosophist may be summed up in the following words of Annie Besant, the second international president of the Theosophical Society:

O hidden life, vibrant in every atom.
O hidden light, shining in every creature.
O hidden love, embracing all in oneness,
May all who feel themselves as one with thee
Know they are therefore one with every other.

To the few, that aspiration is no dream but a reality. To the majority, it may be just a dream, but if so, it is a noble dream worthy of pursuit.

The Secret Gateway has been written to show that the fundamental principles of Theosophy can be found throughout nature. Since we are part of nature, those principles also affect us. A central aim of the book is to help you discover how universal principles operate in your life. Insofar as is possible the book cites evidence from scientific and other sources to support theories expressed. Where appropriate, there are simple exercises that you may do to help deepen your experience of Theosophical insights. The book begins with a question about truth. It moves on to a presentation of Theosophical metaphysics as reasonable theory to be explored. Following that, there are chapters dealing with the inner self, the likelihood of life after death, good and evil, Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society, and a way of life that leads to freedom and bliss.

Theosophy has not solved all the mysteries of life. It has merely lifted a corner of the veil. By reading this book with an open mind and an eager intellect, you may be encouraged to probe more profoundly into your self. If you do, it is almost certain that eventually you will discover that deep within your own consciousness you are one with the Eternal.

May your search be fruitful, and may it lead you to the secret gateway that opens on to a more meaningful and rewarding life.

The Compassionate Monkey

Excerpted from

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By Edward Abdill

(December 2005 • \$14.95 paper • 220 pages • 5 1/2 x 8 1/2 • 0-8356-0842-5)

Once upon a time there lived a very good monkey. He was kind and considerate of his fellow creatures. He wanted what was best for them.

One day there was a terrible flash flood, and the monkey found himself being swept away by the fierce current. He struggled to get to the shore, but he could not. He thought surely that he would soon drown.

Suddenly a branch of an overhanging tree appeared just ahead of him. He reached up, grabbed it securely, and pulled himself up to safety. The monkey was tremendously relieved. Then he looked down into the torrent and saw the fish being tossed about madly. He wanted to save them from certain death. Ever so carefully, he held the branch with one hand and reached down to save the first fish that he saw by grabbing it with the other hand. Then he gently took the fish up to safety next to him on the tree branch.

The monkey wanted to do good, but without knowing what the good was, he killed the fish that he intended to save.

To do the good, we must know what the good is.

Chapter One The Inquiring Mind

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We human beings have always made assumptions about our origin and destiny. Over the centuries, widely accepted views have been codified into tenets of religious faith or presented as scientific theories, and most of us have accepted what we have been told by those who claim to know. To borrow an idea from the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *The King and I*, we are convinced that what we really do not know is so.

Contrary to the belief systems offered by many religions, the Theosophical view is that we must discover truth within ourselves. It must result from our experience rather than from our belief.

To experience truth is to understand a principle. That understanding comes to us in a sudden, timeless flash. One minute we do not understand, and the next we do. There is no measurable time between knowing and not knowing. When such insight illumines the mind, belief is replaced by understanding. The result of that intuitive flash is an experience of integration, wholeness, peace, and in some cases even bliss. For a timeless moment, we may say that our mind has become one with truth itself. The knower and the known have become one. There is no longer self and the truth, but only the truth. We are at one with that truth only in the flash of understanding. At the same time, that understanding has subtly changed us, even though it may take us years to fully work out the implications of the insight.

To say that truth must be experienced is not to say that intellectual knowledge is unimportant. There are many critically important facts that we must learn, such as our home address, the number of miles between our city and another that we wish to visit, or where we keep our coat. There are, however, other kinds of knowledge that we get only from experience. For example, we may read books on how to ride a bicycle, but we'll

never be able actually to ride until we get on a bicycle and learn to manage it by trial and error.

What ancient sages have said or what our contemporaries teach may fascinate us. The words of others may even stimulate us to search further. Yet believing something simply because someone has told it to us is much like reading books on bicycle riding, remembering what was said, and thinking that we now know how to ride a bicycle.

H.P. Blavatsky, founder of the modern Theosophical movement, insisted that Truth could not be taught in words. In one of her key works, *The Voice of the Silence*, she writes, "The teacher can but point the way" (45). Words can do no more than that. We can express our beliefs and theories in words, but we cannot cause others to experience a truth simply by telling them.

Moreover, belief and theory alone are not only insufficient. When they crystallize into a belief system, they can actually block our understanding and spiritual development. This can be illustrated by a simple example: Some friends describe their home to us. They tell us about the various rooms, about their garden and front lawn, and even about the surrounding neighborhood. All they say is completely accurate. We form a picture of their house and its environs as they talk, and we are invited to visit. However, when we actually see the house and the neighborhood, they are different from what we had imagined. A description can only prompt us to discover the reality of the thing described. To know our friend's home, we must experience it for ourselves. When we do, it is different from what we believed based on the description.

Likewise, if friends describe a delicious but rare tropical fruit that we have never seen or tasted, their description may be completely accurate. It is sweet, they tell us. It tastes something like a blend of mango, peach, and pineapple. Having heard their accurate description, do we now know how it tastes? Of course not. We must taste it ourselves in order to know, and when we do, it will inevitably taste different from what we imagined.

In the same way, when we hear or read a teaching or doctrine, we form an idea out of our own experience of what it refers to. But if we ourselves have not had the experience that the teaching refers to, the ideas we form about it will inevitably be false.

To say that Truth cannot be conveyed in words does not mean that we should abandon reasonable assumptions about reality. The theories may be quite accurate, the teachings sound. Yet unless we verify them both outside and inside ourselves, we will be caught in error. What we are asked to do is to realize that all theories are maps; they are not the places the maps represent.

Current scientific theories are based largely on measurement, but that method can only be applied to the sensory world. Our subjective states can only be measured in terms of their effects on the brain and body. Currently there is no way to measure our values, our beliefs, or even to prove or disprove that we have (or are) immortal souls. Yet sages

from every culture and every time have claimed that there is a way to certain knowledge — knowledge of self and the universe. It is not by measurement, but by a way of life that makes us ourselves the laboratory.

Can we ever come to know the ultimate truth about the universe and our own nature, subjectively as well as objectively? We may long to discover truth, but what is truth? When Pilate asked that question, Jesus did not answer. He was silent, perhaps because ultimate truth cannot be put into words. Can we ever know who we really are? If we rely only on theory, or on the words of those we admire, we can no more know the truth of who we are than we can ride a bicycle after reading a book on the subject.

If we are sincere in our search for Truth, then we must begin with an open mind and an acknowledgement of our ignorance. We have all been conditioned by our culture and by our personal experience. It is not easy for us to rise above that in order to try to *see* accurately. Few are willing to make the personal sacrifices necessary to do that. We tend to become attached to our beliefs so strongly that we often identify with them. We *are* our beliefs. Raised in a particular culture, we say that we are Christians, Jews, or Hindus, when the fact is that we are all simply human beings conditioned differently and believing differently. We tend to ignore evidence that contradicts our beliefs, because a challenge to our worldview threatens our inner sense of security. To see "outside the box" requires courage, strong intellect, and humility. Lacking those qualities, we accept beliefs that feel comforting rather than truth, which may require radical self-transformation. We see the emperor fully clothed when he is indeed naked. We refuse to be confused by fact.

In the following pages you will find a worldview that appeals both to reason and to the heart. Facts, theories, and subjective evidence are presented in support of this unique Theosophical paradigm. Rather than accepting or rejecting the theories, you are asked to consider the evidence and then test it out both subjectively within yourself and objectively in the outer world.

The Buddha taught that no one should accept something merely because it was written in books, ancient or modern; neither should we accept something just because he or some other sage said it. He taught that we should only accept what appeals to our own common sense and reason. That was good advice many centuries ago, and it is good advice now.

Chapter Two The Eternal One

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In the late nineteenth century, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky published a more modern statement of what has been called the perennial philosophy, the ancient wisdom, or Theosophy. What she offered was not a new doctrine or a new belief system, but a synthesis of principles from the wisdom tradition that has run through all the great cultures of humanity. The subtitle of her major work, *The Secret Doctrine*, reads, “The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy.” To justify such a subtitle, she gathered evidence from the world’s religions and philosophies and, wherever possible, from the science of her day.

The Secret Doctrine was not written to add one more religious or scientific theory to the many already available. It was written to stimulate both mind and heart. It was written to inspire people to search for Truth. In spite of the fact that *The Secret Doctrine* appears to be a gigantic work that might appeal only to the intellect, Blavatsky claimed that it was written to stimulate our “higher faculties.” It was written to quicken the intuition, to lead to insight into Truth.

Everything that Blavatsky taught had one central purpose. She was convinced that the world would be an infinitely better and happier place when humanity understood its origin, place, and destiny in the universe. She believed that our behavior will change radically for the better once we understand the inner laws of our subjective nature as well as the outer laws of the physical world. In a letter to the American convention of the Theosophical Society, Blavatsky wrote:

The ethics of Theosophy are more important than any divulgement of psychic laws and facts. The latter relate wholly to the material and evanescent part of ... man, but the ethics sink into and take hold of the real man — the reincarnating Ego. We are outwardly creatures of but a day; within we are eternal. (*Collected Writings* 12:156).

In the proem of *The Secret Doctrine* she claims that the entire work rests upon three fundamental propositions. Here is an abridgement of her description of the first fundamental proposition:

An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable PRINCIPLE on which all speculation is impossible, since it transcends the power of human conception and could only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude. It is beyond the range and reach of thought — in the words of the *Mandukya Upanishad*, "unthinkable and unspeakable" (*The Secret Doctrine*, 1:14).

Clearly, this first proposition can never be proven in a conventional sense. Yet there is a great deal of evidence that suggests it may be true. Modern physics, the hardest of our sciences, holds that before there was a manifested universe, there was *nothing*. That "nothing" has been called the pre-Big Bang void, eternal, boundless, nonexistent space. It is the One without a second because there is nothing to contrast it with. But it is nothing only in the sense that it is no *thing*. Both current scientific theory and Theosophical philosophy assert that out of that no-thing-ness came all that ever was, is, or could ever be. It is *that* from which all this arose. It is therefore both nothing and everything, because in that nothingness lies the potential for all, even our whole subjective nature.

This principle is "unthinkable" because we can only think by means of contrasts, and in the no-thing-ness, there is no contrast. A simple example can help bring home the truth of this idea. Imagine yourself to be alone in space. There is no air, no sun, no moon, no earth. You are completely immobile. Yet you are serene and content. Imagining yourself there without contrast of any kind, including air, can you tell whether or not you are moving through space? Do you see that without contrast of some kind it would be impossible to know if you were moving or standing still?

Consider our language, the vehicle of our thoughts. Every word we utter has meaning only because the concept it represents implies the existence of its opposite. The word "up" has meaning only because there is "down." Similarly, the word "mountain" would have no meaning if there were no valleys or plains. "White" is meaningless without the existence of colors to act as a contrast. We can speak of "male" only because there is "female." One could go on with nearly endless examples, but we will never find a word or concept that can have meaning without contrast. Before the Big Bang, there was no contrast. There was only an unspeakable, timeless eternity.

Perhaps humanity has always been dimly aware of that timeless eternity. In the great religious traditions of the world we find scriptures that seem to point toward this unspeakable and eternal reality. Scriptures, of course, are often better read as poetry than as prose. They are filled with metaphors woven into meaningful myths. By no means do all scriptures agree, especially if taken literally. Yet this omnipresent, eternal, boundless, immutable, and unspeakable Principle of which Blavatsky speaks appears under different names in nearly all religions.

In Hinduism it is called *parabrahm*. Seeking to understand *parabrahm*, the student asks the teacher if *parabrahm* is light. The teacher replies *neti, neti*: “Not this, not that.” The student probes further and asks if it is power. Again the answer is *neti, neti*. Is it darkness? Is it goodness? Is it knowledge? Is it love? To each and every question, the teacher responds, *neti, neti*. It is unspeakable.

In Judaism the sacred name of God may not be pronounced in the secular world of time. In the written word the vowel is removed, thus making “G-d” unspeakable. In the Christian scriptures we read that “No man hath seen God at any time.” And in Islam, no image of God is permitted. Each of these traditions symbolically points toward the fact that this ultimate principle can never be described by words.

In every one of these religions, that unspeakable reality is said to be eternal. Moreover, the whole sensate world, including humanity, originates there. It is the ground of all being, the source of all life.

A verse of the Christian hymn “Immortal, Invisible” reveals another common thread of wisdom associated with this unspeakable reality that is called God in the West.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
In all life thou livest, the true life of all;
We blossom and flourish, like leaves on the tree,
Then wither and perish; but naught changeth thee.

In Genesis we read that God breathes life into human beings (Gen. 2:7). He is therefore our “true life.” The dust of our bodies will wither and perish, but the inner life will not die. St. Paul speaks of “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). In John’s Gospel we find: “In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). Then in Acts 17:28 we are told that *in Him* “we live and move and have our being.” In these passages, is it not likely that the writers are referring to the divine inner life rather than to the historical Jesus? In Eastern scriptures we find a similar idea. One of the Hindu scriptures has the deity say, “Having created all of myself, yet I remain.” In this view, our life is not separate from the divine life, but at one with it.

In addition to some evidence supplied by modern physics and the scriptural statements from religion, there is testimonial evidence from mystics. It is not uncommon for mystics from East and West to report a sense of unity with all that lives. That experience of unity often results in an altruistic life that is the very essence of sainthood.

Science can deduce that all arose out of the pre—Big Bang void, religion can speak of the eternal and call it God, and mystics can tell of their unitive experience with the eternal. Yet with all the evidence we have from these sources, it remains impossible for that nonmaterial reality to be *directly* perceived. Why should that be?

We have already considered the fact that without contrast, nothing would be “speakable”; that is, words are incapable of communicating meaning without the existence of something other than what the word signifies. Even “nothingness” has

meaning to us only because there is “somethingness.” Yet this may not be the only reason why the nonmaterial reality is “unthinkable and unspeakable.”

Theosophical philosophy suggests that, however diverse our sensate experiences may be, the source of our consciousness is a point in that nonmaterial reality, often called the divine self. If that is so, then we cannot *directly* perceive the source of our own being. A simple example may make that clear.

Consider the human eye. We can safely say that our eye will never see itself. We can see our eye only by reflection. One day we may be able to see every atom of our eye magnified by some instrument and projected on to a screen. Yet that image is not the eye itself. It is only its reflection.

From the Theosophical point of view, we cannot directly know the eternal, because at the very source of our being we *are* the eternal. As the medieval German mystic Meister Eckhart said, “Since we arose out of nothing, nothing is our true home.”

Such an abstract idea may appear meaningless to us. What do we care about abstract space while we are so absorbed in our everyday problems? A simple meditative exercise may help us to realize how useful such a concept can be.

Since physics no longer considers matter to be hard, unbreakable stuff that occupies space, we may consider the fact that we are actually more space than substance. We, along with the rest of nature, are made up of atoms, but there is space between the nucleus and the electrons of every atom. If we could enlarge an atom so that the nucleus were the size of an orange over New York, the nearest electron would be the size of a lemon over Chicago. The distance in space between New York and Chicago takes roughly two hours to traverse by jet. The actual space between the nucleus and the nearest electron is microscopic, but in microscopic terms we can still say that there is more space in an atom than substance. It follows that we who are made up of atoms are actually more space than matter, but we seldom consider the implications of that fact.

Now let us use our creative imagination by identifying with the space of our body. We may think, “I am the space of my body.” The words are used only to indicate what we are to do in the exercise. Once we understand, we may dispense with the words. Try to *be* the space. Do not imagine yourself *in* the space.

Now imagine that you, as the space, are expanding in all directions until you fill the space of the building you are in. Pause there for a few moments, or a minute, and then expand further to become the space of your city. Pause again, and then continue to become the space of the whole earth as it is gently rolled through space. Now expand to become the space of the solar system and pause there.

Now reverse the process, so that you become the space of the solar system, the earth, your city, your building, your body. At each stage it is important that you feel that you *are* the space, not that you are in it like an astronaut cut off from the space ship. The entire exercise may be done in five or ten minutes.

Many people who do this exercise report that it brings them a great sense of peace. They have identified with one of the most abstract of all concepts — space — and it has had an immediate and direct effect on them in the here and now.