

Some Observations on the
Study of The Secret Doctrine
of H. P. Blavatsky

B. P. WADIA



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B. P. WADIA

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FOREWORD

REGARDING THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE SECRET DOCTRINE

The Secret Doctrine is dedicated to all true Theosophists in every country and of every race. "For," said H. P. B., "they called it forth and for them it was recorded." *The Secret Doctrine* therefore is a Record, and thus a very different kind of a book than ordinary publications. For the student who wants to learn from this wonderful Record, it is necessary that he should take note of the following three very important and significant statements regarding the actual authorship of the book:—

Statement (1) "I wonder if this note of mine is worthy of occupying a select spot with the documents reproduced, and which of the peculiarities of the 'Blavatskian' style of writing it will be found to most resemble? The present is simply to satisfy the doctor that 'the more proof given the less believed.' Let him take my advice and not make these two documents public. It is for his own satisfaction the undersigned is happy to assure him that *The Secret Doctrine*, when ready, will be the triple production of (here are the names of one of the Masters and of H. P. B.) and..... most humble servant," (signed by the other).

On the back of this was the following, signed by the Master who is mentioned in the above:—

"If this can be of any use or help to....., though I doubt it, I, the humble undersigned Faquir, certify that *The Secret Doctrine* is dictated to (name of H. P. B.) partly by myself and partly by my brother....."

Statement (2) "The certificate given last year, saying that *The Secret Doctrine* would be, when finished, the triple production of (H. P. B.'s name),, and myself, was and is correct, although some have doubted not only the facts given in it, but also the authenticity of the message in which it was contained. Copy this, and also keep the copy of the aforesaid certificate. You will find them both of use on the day when you shall, as will happen without your asking, receive from the hands of the very person to whom the certificate was given, the original for the purpose of allowing you to copy it; and then you can verify the corrections of this presently forwarded copy. And it may then be well to indicate to those wishing to know what portions in *The Secret Doctrine* have been copied by the pen of (H. P. B.'s name) into its pages, though without quotation marks, from my own manuscript and perhaps from....., though the last is more difficult from the rarity of his known writing and greater ignorance of his style. All this and more will be found necessary as time goes on, but for which you are well qualified to wait."

Statement (3) "I have also noticed your thoughts about *The Secret Doctrine*. Be assured that what she has not *annotated* from scientific and other works we have given or suggested to her. Every mistake or erroneous notion, corrected and explained by her from the works of other theosophists *was corrected by me, or under my instruction*. It is a more valuable work than its predecessor, an epitome of occult truths that will make it a source of information and instruction

for the earnest student for long years to come.”
(From a letter of Master K. H. to Colonel Olcott, published in “Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom”—page 54).

Statements (1) and (2) given above will be found in “Reminiscences of H. P. B. and ‘*The Secret Doctrine*’” by The Countess Wachtmeister and Others, at pages 114—116. The circumstances under which these certificates were given are narrated therein by Dr. Hubbe-Schleiden, page 113, as follows:

“I never did and never shall judge of the value or the origin of any mental product from the way and manner in which it is produced. And for this reason I withheld my opinion then, thinking and saying: ‘I shall wait until *The Secret Doctrine* is finished and then I can read it quietly; that will be the test for me, the only one that will be any good.’

“This is the reason why on the night of my last parting from H. P. B., the two certificates, which were printed for the first time in the last April number of *The Path*, page 2, were given to me.”

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE
STUDY OF THE SECRET DOCTRINES OF
H. P. BLAVATSKY.*

“What I do believe in is: (1) the unbroken oral teachings revealed by living *divine* men during the infancy of mankind to the elect among men; (2) that it has reached us *unaltered*; and (3) that the Masters are thoroughly versed in the science based on such *uninterrupted* teaching.”

H. P. B. in *Lucifer*, October, 1889.

“*The Secret Doctrine is not a treatise, or a series of vague theories, but contains all that can be given out to the world in this century.*”

Secret Doctrine, Volume I, Page XXXVIII.
(Edition 1888).

People who attend classes for the study of *The Secret Doctrine* usually do so for one of two reasons. First, there are those who want the teachings for the purpose of self-improvement, who go to the book with the hope of obtaining simple, clear-cut formulae for the development of psychical or abnormal powers, such powers as the great author of the book, H. P. Blavatsky, is herself reported to have possessed; some seek mental self-improvement, hoping that the book will enable them to run the race of the competitive life on this earth in a more efficient manner. Secondly, there are those who go to the book with the hope of obtaining straight, definite teachings of Theosophy presented in a way that an ordinary intelligent individual can grasp, with the desire of imparting the teachings to others, and helping them to understand the great truths; these desire to

* Report of a talk to a group of students and enquirers given at the Headquarters of the Theosophical Association of New York, on Saturday, February 18th, 1922.

learn so that they may teach. In both these cases the student is apt to be disappointed; for, while it is quite true that *The Secret Doctrine* does help individual spiritual growth, it does so along a line that is the least suspected by the would-be student; while it is also true that the teachings of *The Secret Doctrine* are there for all those who possess a mind not altogether untutored, still the information conveyed, the teachings imparted, the whole exposition of Theosophy is put forward in an unexpected style, in an unfamiliar way, by a strange and almost unique method.

Sometimes people complain that H. P. B. did not know how to write clearly and lucidly. That is not so. Readers of the *Key to Theosophy* can testify to the fact that the author of *The Secret Doctrine* possesses the faculty of expounding her teachings in a very lucid, clear-cut and straightforward manner. Let it be therefore noted that H. P. B. had a purpose in view when she wrote as she did write; that H. P. B. had not an "involved style of writing," as it is often called, is clearly proven to the reader of such of her books as *Caves and Jungles of Hindustan* and *Nightmare Tales*. H. P. B. had the power of giving out her teachings in a direct and lucid manner whenever she chose to do so; if at any time she followed a method other than that, it was with a distinct purpose in view. That purpose relates itself to the developing of that faculty or quality to which reference will be made. Another criticism of the writer of *The Secret Doctrine* may well be taken up here. It is often claimed by her critics that she wanders into by-ways and digressions in presenting her subject, that she often flies off at a tangent and labors unnecessarily to prove her point by quoting ancient texts and modern authors. In this connection let it not be forgotten that H. P. B. was an occultist, and that no occultist ever

puts his teachings before the public on his own authority alone, unsupported by corroborative testimony of occultists of previous ages. H. P. B. could never say: "I have had a vision; it is your duty to accept it." She, as an occultist, was obliged to give all the evidence that she could gather to support her teachings, and this she has done.

A proper study of *The Secret Doctrine* should accomplish two things; if the student proceeds along the right lines, his own inner life will get an impetus and his own spiritual progress will be furthered; also his capacity to learn and to gather information and thereby to teach and serve others will be greatly strengthened.

The Secret Doctrine, when correctly studied, produces a definite change in those who study it. The specific method which has been employed in writing the book brings out a particular kind of faculty in the student—the faculty of spiritual perception. That faculty is the penetrative quality of the mind; that aspect of mind which has for its nature the quality of penetration into any subject which is being studied. Therefore the student of *The Secret Doctrine* should always remember that the study of this book will awaken in him, and will strengthen in him that particular faculty which will enable him to penetrate more fully into *all* subjects, whether these subjects be inside or outside *The Secret Doctrine*. In this study, properly carried on, a particular mental process is bound to take place in which this faculty will be sharpened; this is the special contribution which the study of *The Secret Doctrine* makes to personal progress. Naturally this faculty does not appear instantaneously—its development takes time; neither will the occasional perusal of the book, nor the attendance of a study-class once a week, bring this faculty to light. But if the student takes *The Secret Doctrine* as his book of individual study, and gives to it one half hour of his time every day at a

regular hour, great results can be brought about. If such a course be pursued, the mind, because of the law of automatic action, will begin to operate, will commence to respond to the vibrations that are raised by the study of this book, so that when the hour of the weekly class arrives, the faculty is brought to it sharpened in some measure by the daily effort, and much more keenly sensitive than would have been possible without this daily work.

INDIVIDUAL WORK FOR THE CLASS

In order that this faculty may be developed, it is not necessary for the student to read page after page of *The Secret Doctrine*, from the first page to the last, neither is it essential that subject after subject be studied with the help of the index. The point that is of the utmost importance is that the *daily study be undertaken from the point of view of the development of this faculty*. If the book be opened at any page, in either of the two volumes, the student should begin to read with concentration, trying definitely to understand that which he is reading and endeavoring to illuminate his mind in terms of the written thought. In this manner, slowly but steadily the faculty will grow. Unless this individual work be done, the student will not be able to gain or give the greatest possible amount of benefit from and to the group; for, in the class something else should be done. In the class, the faculty which has been steadily growing by the power of individual effort should be applied to grasp and understand some particular subject. The information that one may get about a certain subject is not the first essential, as so many people think; the thing of fundamental concern to the student is the building of this faculty, the developing of this power of mind which, as the ancient books put it,

is capable of alighting upon a subject of putting itself down into it, of sucking out everything that is in the subject and thus illuminating it. The faculty must first be there in order that the subject may be thoroughly and rigidly understood.

Each member of the group should come to the study class with the faculty which he has been sharpening all week through his individual efforts. This faculty he applies in the class to the gaining of knowledge on the particular subject which the group is studying. *The Secret Doctrine* is of so complex a nature, is so intricate in its composition, that it is only when individuals as a group come together to discuss it harmoniously, to give all that each has to give and to take all that the others have to offer, that a thorough and complete understanding of its teachings becomes possible. Very few minds can accomplish this individually, and this is a fact peculiar to the study not only of *The Secret Doctrine* but of all occult books. Consider the manner in which the Upanishads used to be studied in the East. Each individual took a verse and meditated upon it; then verse after verse the Upanishads were repeated and chanted in groups, each verse being discussed and debated in order that the truth underlying it be thoroughly understood and comprehended, and thus made part and parcel of the life. Thus in all the old schools, even in the rules as observed today in true occult schools the double aspect of study is found; first the aspect of individual study, where the effort is made to develop the faculty, then the aspect of group study where the students come together to express and exchange their views, and where the faculty gained by individual effort is applied in a certain way and for a certain purpose.

THE OBJECT OF THE CLASS

The object of group study is twofold: first to gather information, to learn something definite; second to teach to others what has been learned. If self-improvement alone be the motive that actuates the study of *The Secret Doctrine*, the knowledge acquired will not be full or profound. The book is without doubt written for the spiritual growth of the student, but this growth is possible only when the teachings are utilized for the spiritual help of others. This does not necessarily mean that the facts learned are to be given to others; it means that certain aspects of the truths that have been learned, with their application to the affairs of daily life, be passed on to those with whom the student comes into contact. The effort must be made to help others by means of the things that have been learned in the group, otherwise the work of the group is not complete. Suppose the group is studying the subject of Rounds and Races. The subject is not very simple, and to teach it as such would be neither interesting nor helpful to the majority of people. But in the practical application of the teachings in every day life much interest would be found and much good could be accomplished. The discovery of what the Races are in the humanity that surrounds us, the meaning of cycles and their application to life, all these things are of practical value and should be passed on to those outside the class room.

Just as the individual has a certain relationship to the group, so has the group itself a definite relationship to the wide world outside. *Both* of these must be borne in mind by the student, as upon these two relationships depends the success of any study group. That each individual sharpens his faculties so that he may serve his own group, and that each group gains knowledge so that it may better serve the world-

group called Humanity ; this should be the foundation stone and the basic aim of every individual in every group that takes up the study of *The Secret Doctrine*.

THE METHOD OF STUDY

Now as to the method of study which has been found to be most helpful. Many people, when beginning the study of *The Secret Doctrine*, lose themselves in innumerable details, before they have even faintly grasped the meaning of the subject itself. The first general rule for a study-group is to obtain a fair view of the entire structure of *The Secret Doctrine* with the help of the Contents and a general turning over of the pages of the two volumes. A careful perusal of the Preface, Introductory, Proem and Summing up in the first Volume, and of the Preliminary Notes and the Conclusion in the Second will give an adequate idea of the superstructure of the book.

When this is done a particular subject may be chosen for study. This study must devote its early period to grasping principles, broad and general facts, paying no attention to the details.

Study the subject as thoroughly as possible with the help of the Index and other works of H. P. B. *Isis Unveiled*, *Key to Theosophy*, *Modern Panarion*, *Voice of the Silence*, etc., and her articles in the *Theosophist*, *Lucifer* and *The Path*. Then write down what is learned and if the tendency is to go into details, check it and confine the efforts to the expression of broad principles. The attempt should be made to write this resumé of the study in simple, untechnical language, using words, phrases and sentences which are familiar to the ordinary man or woman in the street. The real test of understanding a teaching comes when the student is able to express this teaching in simple, untechnical terminology, and

until this is possible, he has not mastered the teaching thoroughly.

This implies that every member of the group should participate in the work of gathering information and presenting it in a proper and suitable form to the group. No leader, however clever or however industrious in his work for the class, can do full justice to all the books of H. P. B., and therefore the various volumes of her writings should be distributed to the different members of the class, each member of the class having a special book for his own particular work. If the study group be of the nature of a round table conference, to which every member comes with his own contribution, willing not only to learn but to teach as well, genuine work will be accomplished. It is necessary to work in order to gain wisdom, and this distribution of labor among all the members of the class makes it possible to avoid the institution of teacher and taught, leader and listener, and tends to produce the atmosphere of impersonality so important and necessary in work of this kind.

When the broad principles are mastered and outlined, the study group should go into the numerous details, fill in the gaps and complete the summary. These summaries should be produced for the helping of others; therefore the summaries should not be criticism or personal interpretation of the writers of the summary but should be *faithful translation* of H. P. B's teachings. What is wanted is *her* teaching and opinions, not our views on them.

The idea of using the material which has been gathered at the study classes as the basis of future lessons for other people is a primary factor in group work, and therefore the selection of subjects in which the outside world would be interested becomes of

paramount importance. If the student intends to prepare lessons for other people who are not in the class, people who are not acquainted with *The Secret Doctrine*, the first question he should ask himself is "What are the subjects in which the outside world would be most interested? In which subjects would they be able to find the most help for their next step of growth?" For these teachings should not be given out with the intention of interesting or amusing the public, not even for the purpose of instructing them in an intellectual way; rather should the endeavor be made to give something that will enable people to take the next step forward from the spiritual point of view. Therefore in planning out lessons, the three great I's of teaching should be taken into account—Interest, Instruction, Inspiration; the lessons should arouse the interest of the students, give information and instruction, and at the same time inspire them to take the next step in advance in their own spiritual life.

SELECTION OF SUBJECTS OF STUDY

What are the particular Theosophical teachings that will be of greatest help to the man of the world? The concept of Evolution, the nature of God, God's relation to His Universe through evolution,—these are fundamental things that will interest and instruct and inspire. The simple propositions, the fundamental teachings, the practical things that can be applied in daily life, these are the teachings that should be studied and set forth; the Theosophical concept about the nature of God, about the lines of Evolution, but above all the question—"What is Theosophy?"

H. P. B. herself has given indications in her Proem and the Summing up—The Three Fundamental Propositions established by *The Secret Doctrine* (See Vol. 1, Proem, pages 14-17. Ed. 1888) and the six Items re-

viewed in the Summing up (Vol. 1, pages 269-282) make an excellent foundation for group work. Therefore the following definite suggestions may be put forward for study work:

FIRST. Understand thoroughly and in all its inwardness the teaching of H. P. B. on "What is Theosophy."

SECOND. Study the Three fundamental Propositions.

THIRD. Study the Summing up, especially the six items.

If success is hoped for, it is a wise thing for the group to have a definite plan, and in this plan the time element should play an important part. It is also wise for the group to definitely formulate the essential details of the plan before the first meeting where study will begin, and after these details are formulated they should be strictly adhered to. Members of the group should look upon each meeting as a strict duty which should be religiously performed, and sundry interferences should not be allowed to creep in.

THE MIND OF THE AUTHOR

In the study of *The Secret Doctrine*, an attempt should be made by each student to contact the Mind of the writer. If the student sits down to his study with his lower mind emptied of all thoughts, and entirely at rest, at peace with itself and all the world, if he approaches his study with a feeling of willingness, nay eagerness, to grapple with a difficult subject and a determination to attempt to contact the Mind of the writer of the book, then may he hope for real results. If the group of students who are gathered together for the purpose of studying *The Secret Doctrine* begin each meeting with a short meditation on

the particular aspect of wisdom that they wish to contact; if they harmoniously and in perfect unity try to lift their thoughts to a higher level; if they be intent, concentrated and harmonious, not making cross currents by unnecessary debate and discussion but each making his contribution as it comes to him, each in his way trying to contact the Mind of the author of the book, if this method of study be followed, help and illumination will come. And this help and illumination will come not only from the student's mind but also from the Mind that recorded the teachings, for that Mind is very much alive and will help the students of the book if they proceed in the right manner, along the occult and spiritual line.

STUDY AND INTERPRETATION

Therefore, in order that the best results may accrue, certain things should be definitely settled before the group has its first study meeting—such as the day and hour, the procedure of study, the method of study and the material which will be taken up, the order in which the class will be conducted, and all the other details. When the study meetings themselves have begun, when the students are gathered together in perfect unity and harmony, with minds consecrated to the task that lies before them, in proportion as the mind of each student is concentrated and perfectly at rest, ideas will begin to strike him. This last phrase is a good one, for when the student begins to come into the spiritual world and into the world of the Masters and Their atmosphere, he will literally find ideas beginning to strike him, ideas which will illuminate the passage he is reading. Information will begin to come to him from within, not from without. If the student takes note of this fact, he will see the reason why it is not wise to come into the atmosphere of discussion

and debate. If the statement of each student be put down, if the contradictions which seemingly appear be also recorded, at the end of the meeting if the whole record be read there will be seen to be a harmonious progress, in spite of the seeming contradictions, in some direction, towards a definite goal; many things, to be sure, will necessarily have to be rejected, but gradually a vast amount of information will be built up and the right method of grasping *The Secret Doctrine* will have been discovered, that method being to read not only between the lines, but within the words as well.

When the topic of study is selected, and when the information about the subject is culled from the two volumes of *The Secret Doctrine*, many students will find that these ideas do not coincide with their own preconceived ideas on the subject. Therefore one of the first things that the student should understand is this: that he is not studying *The Secret Doctrine* for the purpose of getting corroboration of his own theories, but that he is studying it in order to find out what *The Secret Doctrine* has to say on this particular subject, even if these ideas are opposed to his own pet theories. Therefore when the student approaches the study of this book, his own mind should be emptied of preconceived notions and ideas about the subject which he has elected to study. He should not try to read in terms of knowledge gained from other sources; he should try to get at H. P. B.'s meaning, not to impose his own meaning upon her teachings. He should allow H. P. B. to speak, not to speak for her. And in order to understand what she does mean, it is necessary to see what she herself has said, to let her writings speak, and not use books written by other people in order to understand H. P. B.; rather it is wise to use what H. P. B.

herself has written, *The Secret Doctrine, Isis Unveiled, A Modern Panarion, Five Years of Theosophy*—all of these books can be studied to get a clearer idea of her teachings.

If the earnest desire is present in the student to fully comprehend H. P. B.'s teachings, and if the effort be made to follow the occult method of study, the faculty of spiritual perception and the faculty of expression will begin to flower in him; for these two faculties go always hand in hand—the faculty of perception which comes from individual study and the faculty of expression by group study. And as these two faculties begin to become inter-related in the student, he will find arising in himself that spiritual power, that inner, higher intuitive mind, so that he will carry the atmosphere of *The Secret Doctrine* with him all the time, he will be able to understand subjects that are not even mentioned in the book. The student must get into the very life of that book; he should, so to speak, envelop himself in its aura, surround himself with its atmosphere, so that its force goes with him everywhere.

THE REAL AUTHORS OF THE BOOK

And now let me come to the closing point. Never forget that H. P. B.'s *Secret Doctrine* forms part of the Record in the custody of the Masters. From 1875, her teachings have guided the true student in his quest, and till 1975 they will continue so to guide. It is not essential to labour that point here. All that is necessary is to draw the attention of the student to the fact that H. P. B. was a Messenger of the Great Lodge, the Occult Fraternity, and that she wrote the book in the company, under the guidance and with the co-operation of the Great Masters. Every

group endeavoring to study the Book should earnestly and seriously attempt to contact the life of the Real Authors, H. P. B. and her Collaborators.

The Masters live, and we should try with zeal and devotion to make them real in our lives. Nothing helps the honest student in this task more than the right study of *The Secret Doctrine*. Masters can not be found by practice of psychic tricks and by dubious contacts with astralism. They can only be found by meditation and study, by intellectual honesty, by sincerity of purpose, and above all by the uttermost purity of life.

True Occultism, whose Teachings are expounded in *The Secret Doctrine*, does not recognize direct or indirect, conscious or unconscious contacting of forces which are not of white or beneficent magic. It demands rigid self-discipline of life, the complete subduing of our selfish and animal propensities, the unequivocal denial to countenance in ourselves or in others any non-pure or non-moral aspects of life, much less of impure or immoral ones. The Road to the Masters is the Road of Purity—all other roads are false. Therefore it is essential that members of *The Secret Doctrine* study groups should pursue devoutly the Life of Purity. Not only is individual study necessary, but the students, to obtain real results, should earnestly, zealously and devotedly attempt to live the necessary life of Purity, of Self-Abnegation and of Brotherhood. Let the student bring to his study class pure and upright forces of life, chastened intelligence and real desire to learn the Living Truth of the Masters of Life. With a single eye fixed upon the Lords of Light and Love, with humility but with sure confidence let him go forward, steadfast and persistent, until he passes from the Great Book to the Living Reality behind it.

"These two volumes only constitute the work of a pioneer who has forced his way into the well-nigh impenetrable jungle of the virgin forests of the Land of the Occult. A commencement has been made to fell and uproot the deadly upas trees of superstition, prejudice and conceited ignorance, so that these two volumes should form for the student a fitting prelude for Volumes III and IV. Until the rubbish of the ages is cleared away from the minds of the Theosophists to whom these volumes are dedicated, it is impossible that the more practical teaching contained in the third Volume should be understood. Consequently, it entirely depends upon the reception with which Volumes I and II will meet at the hands of Theosophists and Mystics, whether these last two volumes will ever be published, though they are almost completed."

SECRET DOCTRINE,

Vol. II, pages 797-798 (Ed. 1888).

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These books can be obtained at the Headquarters
 of The Theosophical Association 230 Madison
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