

*The student's approach to  
The Secret Doctrine*



## Prefatory Notes by the Series Editor

This document outlines the student's approach to *The Secret Doctrine*, as commended by the Author herself and B.P. Wadia, the pre-eminent analyst of the Stanzas of Dzyan.

The first part was originally dictated by H.P. Blavatsky to R. Bowen, in response to his request for advice as to how one should approach *The Secret Doctrine*. It was first published by *Theosophy in Ireland*, in 1932, and subsequently republished by various organisations. It became known as the "Bowen Notes."

The second part appeared as Notes on "The preparation and subjects for study" by B.P. Wadia, one of a series of forty-two essays under the holding title "Studies in the Secret Doctrine," published by Theosophy (Los Angeles) during the years 1922-25 and subsequently reprinted by *The Theosophical Movement* (Bombay). It is doubtful whether at the time Wadia was aware of the "Bowen Notes."

Once the origin of sentient life and the Universal Laws governing Cosmos and Man are grasped by the intellect and upheld by the highest perceptions, they will quicken the perennial tree of Altruism and shelter all that lives from the atrocities of Egotism.

For the benefit of those who may wish to begin studying in earnest, the full version of the commended material can be found under the title "All-important pages from the Secret Doctrine," in the same series.



## Opening Thoughts by the Author of the Secret Doctrine

*The Secret Doctrine* merely asserts that a system, known as the WISDOM-RELIGION, the work of generations of adepts and seers, the sacred heirloom of pre-historic times — actually exists, though hitherto preserved in the greatest secrecy by the present Initiates; and it points to various corroborations of its existence to this very day, to be found in ancient and modern works. Giving a few fragments only, it there shows how these explain the religious dogmas of the present day, and how they might serve Western religions, philosophies and science, as sign-posts along the untrodden paths of discovery. The work is essentially fragmentary, giving statements of sundry facts taught in the esoteric schools — kept, so far, secret — by which the ancient symbolism of various nations is interpreted. It does not even give the *keys* to it, but merely opens a few of the hitherto secret drawers. No *new* philosophy is set up in *The Secret Doctrine*, only the hidden meaning of some of the religious allegories of antiquity is given, light being thrown on these by the esoteric sciences, and the common source is pointed out, whence all the world-religions and philosophies have sprung. Its chief attempt is to show, that however divergent the respective doctrines and systems of old may *seem* on their external or objective side, the agreement between all becomes perfect, so soon as the esoteric or *inner* side of these beliefs and their symbology are examined and a careful comparison made. It is also maintained that its doctrines and sciences, which form an integral cycle of universal cosmic facts and metaphysical axioms and truths, represent a complete and unbroken system; and that he who is brave and persevering enough, ready to crush the *animal* in himself, and forgetting the human *self*, sacrifices it to his Higher Ego, can always find his way to become initiated into these mysteries. This is all *The Secret Doctrine* claims.<sup>1</sup>

Does it not therefore, stand to reason that a work which compares several dozens of philosophies and over half-a-dozen of world-religions, a work which has to unveil the roots with the greatest precautions, as it can only *hint* at the secret blossoms here and there — cannot be comprehended at a first reading, nor even after several, unless the reader elaborates for himself a system for it?<sup>2</sup>

H.P. BLAVATSKY



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<sup>1</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE BABEL OF MODERN THOUGHT – II), XIII pp. 93-94

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, (MISTAKEN NOTIONS ON THE SECRET DOCTRINE), XII p. 235



## 1. Selections commended to students by H.P. Blavatsky

From R. Bowen's *Madame Blavatsky on how to study Theosophy*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1960; London: The Theosophical Society in England, 1991.

Come to the *Secret Doctrine* without any hope of getting the final truth of existence from it, or with any idea other than seeing how far it may lead *towards* the truth. . . . No matter what [you] may study in the *Secret Doctrine* let the mind hold fast, as the basis of its ideation, to the following ideas.<sup>1</sup>

### The first idea is unity.

This unity is a thing altogether different from the common notion of unity — as when we say that a nation or an army is united; or that this planet is united to that by lines of magnetic force or the like. The teaching is not that. It is that existence is *one thing*, not any collection of things linked together. Fundamentally there is *one being*. The *being* has two aspects, positive and negative. The positive is spirit, or *consciousness*. The negative is *substance*, the subject of consciousness. This being is the absolute in its primary manifestation. Being absolute there is nothing outside it. It is *all-being*. It is indivisible, else it would not be absolute. If a portion could be separated, that remaining could not be absolute, because there would at once arise the question of *comparison* between it and the separated part. Comparison is incompatible with any idea of absoluteness. Therefore it is clear that this fundamental *One Existence*, or Absolute Being, must be the *Reality* in every form there is.

The atom, the man, the god are each separately, as well as all collectively, Absolute Being in their last analysis, that is their real *individuality*. It is this idea which must be held always in the background of the mind to form the basis for every conception that arises from study of the *Secret Doctrine*. The moment one lets it go (and it is most easy to do so when engaged in any of the many intricate aspects of the esoteric philosophy) the idea of *separation* supervenes, and the study loses its value.<sup>2</sup>

### The second idea to hold fast is that there is no dead matter.

Every last atom is itself fundamentally Absolute Being. Therefore there is no such thing as “spaces” or ether, or ākāśa, or call it what you like, in which angels and elementals disport<sup>3</sup> themselves like trout in water. That’s a common idea. The true idea shows every atom of substance no matter of what plane to be in itself a *life*.<sup>4</sup>

Now the Occultists, who:

- Trace every atom in the universe, whether an aggregate or single, to One Unity, or Universal Life;
- Do not recognise that anything in Nature can be inorganic;
- Know of no such thing as dead matter;

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<sup>1</sup> “Bowen Notes,” p. 9

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 9-10

<sup>3</sup> [To divert, to amuse, to move in gaiety]

<sup>4</sup> “Bowen Notes,” p. 11

- Are consistent with their doctrine of spirit and soul when speaking of memory in every atom, of will and sensation.<sup>1</sup>

**The third idea to be held is that man is the microcosm.**

As he is so, then all the hierarchies of the heavens exist within him. But in truth there is neither macrocosm nor microcosm but *One Existence*. Great and small are such only as viewed by a limited consciousness.

**The fourth idea to be held is that expressed in the Great Hermetic axiom.**

It really sums up and synthesises all the others:

As is the inner, so is the outer; as is the great, so is the small; as it is above, so it is below: there is but one life and law; and he that worketh it is one. Nothing is inner, nothing is outer; nothing is great, nothing is small; nothing is high, nothing is low, in the divine economy.<sup>2</sup>

Analogy is the guiding law in nature, the only true Ariadne's thread that can lead us, through the inextricable paths of her domain, toward her primal and final mysteries. Nature, as a creative potency, is infinite, and no generation of physical scientist can ever boast of having exhausted the list of her ways and methods, however uniform the laws upon which she proceeds. If we can conceive of a ball of fire-mist becoming gradually — as it rolls through the aeons of time in the inter-stellar spaces — a planet, a self-luminous globe, to settle into a *man-bearing world*, or Earth, thus having passed from a soft plastic body into a rock-bound globe; and if we see on it everything evolving from the non-nucleated jelly-speck that becomes the [protoplasm] of the moneron,<sup>3</sup> then passes from its protistic<sup>4</sup> state into the form of an animal, to grow into a gigantic reptilian monster of the Mesozoic<sup>5</sup> times; then dwindles again into the (comparatively) dwarfish crocodile, now confined solely to tropical regions, and the universally common lizard<sup>6</sup> — *how can man alone escape the general law?* "There were giants on earth in those days," says Genesis, repeating the statement of all the other Eastern scriptures; and the titans are founded on anthropological and physiological fact.<sup>7</sup>

Did the ancients know of worlds besides their own? . . . We believe it, because the first law in nature is uniformity in diversity, and the second — analogy. "As above, so

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<sup>1</sup> *Secret Doctrine*, II p. 672

<sup>2</sup> "Bowen Notes," pp. 9-10

<sup>3</sup> [Haeckel's hypothetical simplest protozoan, the earliest form of life on earth, from *Gr. moneres*, single. Ernst Haeckel, 1834-1919, was a German zoologist who popularised the ideas of Darwin.]

<sup>4</sup> [Pertaining to *protista*, a large group of unicellular organisms on the borderline between plants and animals, from *Gr.*, *protistos*, very first. Hence, the *monera* are *protista*.]

<sup>5</sup> [Of the secondary geological period, including the Triassic, Jurassic, and Cretaceous systems, from *Gr. mesos*, middle, and *zoe*, life.]

<sup>6</sup> Cf. "Behold the *iguanodon* [a large, bipedal, bird-hipped Jurassic and Cretaceous herbivorous dinosaur, with teeth like those of the iguana; from *iguana* and *Gr.*, *odous*, *odontotos*, tooth] of the Mesozoic ages — the monster 100 feet long — now transformed into the small iguana lizard of South America. Popular traditions about giants in days of old, and their mention in every mythology, including the Bible, may someday be shown to be founded on fact. In nature, *the logic of analogy alone ought to make us accept these traditions as scientific verities.*" *Secret Doctrine*, II p.154 *fn.*

<sup>7</sup> *Secret Doctrine*, II pp. 153-54

below.” That time is gone by for ever, when, although our pious ancestors believed that our earth was in the centre of the universe, the church and her arrogant servants could insist that we should regard as blasphemy the supposition that any other planet could be inhabited. Adam and Eve, the Serpent, and the Original Sin followed by atonement through blood, have been too long in the way, and thus was universal truth sacrificed to the insane conceit of us little men.<sup>1</sup>

[Therefore] no Eastern initiate would speak of spheres “above us, between the earth and the airs,” even the highest, as there is no such division or measurement in occult speech, no “above” as no “below,” but *an eternal “within,” within two other within*s, or the planes of subjectivity merging gradually into that of terrestrial objectivity — this being for man the last one, his own plane.<sup>2</sup>

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**Reading the Secret Doctrine page by page as one reads any other book will only end in confusion. The first thing to do, even if it takes years, is to get some grasp of the “Three Fundamental Principles” [Propositions] given in the Proem. [Vol. I, pp. 14-20]**

[The Secret Doctrine establishes a further three propositions:]<sup>3</sup>

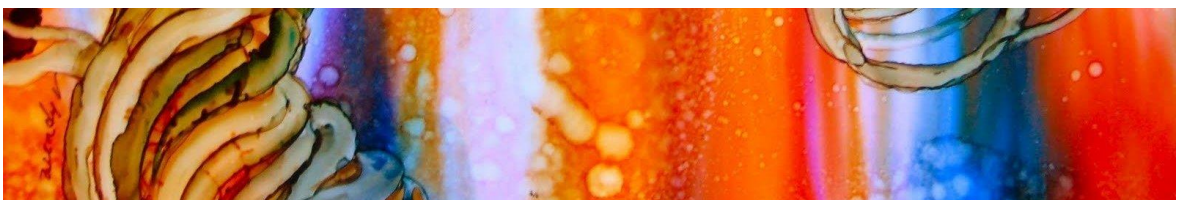
- 1 The simultaneous evolution of seven human groups on seven different portions of our globe.
- 2 The birth of the astral, before the physical body, the former being a model for the latter.
- 3 That man, in this round,<sup>4</sup> preceded every mammalian — the anthropoids included — in the animal kingdom.

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**Follow that up by study of the “Recapitulation” — the numbered items in the “Summing Up” to Vol. I (Part I). [pp. 272-76]**

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**Then take the “Preliminary Notes” (Vol. II), [pp. 1-12] and the Conclusion (Vol. II). [pp. 437-46]**



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<sup>1</sup> *Secret Doctrine*, II p. 699

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, I pp. 671-72

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, II p. 1

<sup>4</sup> [The spiritual impulse evolves according to a 7-fold pattern along a chain of 7 globes, re-visiting each one 7 times; its passage *around* 7 globes is termed *round* (or ring), indicating a period of activity. Our own globe too, the Earth, is one of a chain of 7, however, the other 6 remain invisible to us at present. Our development is heightened on the 4<sup>th</sup> round, in the course of which 7 root races emerge, each root evolving through 7 sub-races. — ED. PHIL.]

## 2. Selections commended to students by B.P. Wadia

From B.P. Wadia's *Studies in "The Secret Doctrine."* [Book II, First Series, The Preparation and Subjects for Study] Bombay: Theosophy Company (India) Private Ltd, 1963; p 20.

The ordinary student's mind, as it is constituted today, in the East as in the West, may gain quicker and better comprehension if it is aided in the selection of pages to be read. While the following plan may not suit all, it has been found useful by a fair number during the last twenty-five years and more.

- 1 Vol. I, pp. 272-73, Item 1 [Source and origin of the Secret Doctrine]
- 2 Vol. I, pp. 297-99 [Truth and Occult Sciences]
- 3 Vol. I, pp. 13-18 (The Three Fundamentals)
- 4 Vol. I, pp. 269-80 [Summing up the Secret Doctrine]
- 5 Vol. I, pp. xvii-xxvii (Introductory)
- 6 Vol. I, pp. 1-24 (Proem)
- 7 Vol. II, pp. 1-12 (Preliminary Notes)
- 8 Vol. I, pp. 303-25 (Symbolism, etc.)



"All-important pages from the Secret Doctrine," in the same series.