

Theoretical and Practical Occultism



Abstract and train of thoughts¹

Between theoretical Occultism or Theosophy, and practical Occultism or Occult Science, there is an abyss.

Warning to students

While the study of theoretical Occultism is harmless, and may do good, practical Occultism, being the “Science of Good and Evil,” is fraught with perils and pitfalls. 3

The student of Occult Arts, who is not intellectually or ethically fit, will be unable to discern the Right from the Left Path. He will bring on himself and his family unexpected woes and sorrows, never suspecting whence they come. 3

Only Absolute Unity, physical and metaphysical, can provide safe passage to the other shore. 4

Whoever indulges, after having pledged himself to Occultism, in the gratification of a worldly love or lust, must feel an almost immediate result: that of being irresistibly dragged from the impersonal divine state down to the lower plane of matter. 5

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¹ Frontispiece by Lady Yana Dhyana.

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Warning to students

As some of the letters in the CORRESPONDENCE of this month show, there are many people who are looking for practical instruction in Occultism. It becomes necessary therefore, to state once for all:

- 1 The essential difference between theoretical and practical Occultism; or what is generally known as Theosophy on the one hand, and Occult science on the other; and
- 2 The nature of the difficulties involved in the study of the latter.

It is easy to become a Theosophist. Any person of average intellectual capacities, and a leaning toward the metaphysical; of pure, unselfish life, who finds more joy in helping his neighbour than in receiving help himself; one who is ever ready to sacrifice his own pleasures for the sake of other people; and who loves Truth, Goodness and Wisdom for their own sake, not for the benefit they may confer — is a Theosophist.

But it is quite another matter to put oneself upon the path which leads to the knowledge of what is good to do, as to the right discrimination of good from evil; a path which also leads a man to that power through which he can do the good he desires, often without even apparently lifting a finger.¹

While the study of theoretical Occultism is harmless, and may do good, practical Occultism, being the “Science of Good and Evil,” is fraught with perils and pitfalls.

The student of Occult Arts, who is not intellectually or ethically fit, will be unable to discern the Right from the Left Path. He will bring on himself and his family unexpected woes and sorrows, never suspecting whence they come.

MAGIC is a dual power: nothing is easier than to turn it into Sorcery; *an evil thought suffices for it*. Therefore while theoretical Occultism is harmless, and may do good, practical Magic, or the fruits of the Tree of Life and Knowledge,² or otherwise the “Science of Good and Evil,” is fraught with dangers and perils. For the study of theo-

¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (PRACTICAL OCCULTISM) IX p. 155

² Some Symbolists, relying on the correspondence of numbers and the symbols of certain things and personages, refer these “secrets” to the mystery of generation. But it is more than this. The glyph of the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil” has no doubt a phallic and sexual element in it, as has the “Woman and the Serpent”; but it has also a psychical and spiritual significance. Symbols are meant to yield more than one meaning.

retical Occultism there are, no doubt, a number of works that may be read with profit, besides such books as the *Finer Forces of Nature*,¹ etc., the *Zohar*, *Sēpher-Yetzirāh*, *The Book of Enoch*,² Franck's *Kabbalah*, and many Hermetic treatises. These are scarce in European languages, but works in Latin by the mediæval Philosophers, generally known as Alchemists and Rosicrucians, are plentiful. But even the perusal of these may prove dangerous for the unguided student. If approached without the right key to them, and if the student is unfit, owing to mental incapacity, for Magic, and is thus unable to discern the Right from the Left Path, let him take our advice and leave this study alone; he will only bring on himself and on his family unexpected woes and sorrows, never suspecting whence they come, nor what are the powers awakened by his mind being bent on them. Works for advanced students are many, but these can be placed at the disposal of only sworn or "pledged" chelas (disciples), those who have pronounced the ever-binding oath, and who are, therefore, helped and protected.³ For all other purposes, well-intentioned as such works may be, they can only mislead the unwary and guide them imperceptibly to Black Magic or Sorcery — if to nothing worse.

The mystic characters, alphabets and numerals found in the divisions and subdivisions of the *Great Kabbalah* are, perhaps, the most dangerous portions in it, and especially the numerals. We say dangerous, because they are the most prompt to produce effects and results, and this with or without the experimenter's will, even without his knowledge. Some students are apt to doubt this statement, simply because after manipulating these numerals they have failed to notice any dire physical manifestation or result. Such results would be found the least dangerous: it is the moral causes produced and the various events developed and brought to an unforeseen crisis, that would testify to the truth of what is now stated had the lay students only the power of discernment.

Only Absolute Unity, physical and metaphysical, can provide safe passage to the other shore.

The point of departure of that special branch of the Occult teaching known as the "Science of Correspondences," numerical or literal or alphabetical, has for its epigraph with the Jewish and Christian Kabbalists, the two misinterpreted verses which say that God

. . . ordered all things in number, measure and weight;⁴

¹ [This title is not in the Würzburg Manuscript (WMS). * p. 63. Re: R. Prasad's book, see *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, Vol. XII, p. 604 *fn.* & 621, where H.P. Blavatsky says, "It recommends Black Magic of the worst kind, and is the very antipodes of spiritual Rāja-Yoga . . ." WMS' references on this page and the following, are from *The Theosophist*, Vol. LIII, December 1932, pp. 265-66. — Boris de Zirkoff.

* WMS stands for the "Würzburg Manuscript," Madame Blavatsky's original and unedited draft of *The Secret Doctrine* (1888). It was named after Würzburg in Bavaria, where she began writing in self-imposed solitude, in August 1885 — as confirmed by Dr. William Hübbe-Schleiden, two months later. In December that year Countess Constance Wachtmeister was "sent" to help out. — ED. PHIL.]

² [The WMS adds here the words: "called by the Greeks *Enoichion*, or the 'internal eye.'"]

³ [WMS: "There are numerous works written for the sworn Initiates only, those who have pronounced the forever-binding oath and who alone can deal with their teachings practically.]

⁴ *Wisdom xi*, 21; Douay version.

And:

He created her in the Holy Ghost, and saw her, and numbered her, and measured her.¹

But the Eastern Occultists have another epigraph:

Absolute Unity, ×, within number and plurality.

Both the Western and the Eastern students of the Hidden Wisdom hold to this axiomatic truth. Only the latter are perhaps more sincere in their confessions. Instead of putting a mask on their Science, they show her face openly, even if they do veil carefully her heart and soul before the unappreciative public and the profane, who are ever ready to abuse the most sacred truths for their own selfish ends. But Unity is the real basis of the Occult Sciences — physical and metaphysical. This is shown even by Éliphas Lévi, the learned Western Kabbalist, inclined as he is to be rather Jesuitical. He says:

Absolute Unity is the supreme and final reason of things. Therefore, that reason can be neither one person, nor three persons; it is Reason, and pre-eminently Reason (*raison par excellence*).^{2, 3}

Whoever indulges, after having pledged himself to Occultism, in the gratification of a worldly love or lust, must feel an almost immediate result: that of being irresistibly dragged from the impersonal divine state down to the lower plane of matter.

How then can it be thought possible for a man to enter the “straight gate” of occultism when his daily and hourly thoughts are bound up with worldly things, desires of possession and power, with lust, ambition and duties, which, however honourable, are still of the earth earthy? Even the love for wife and family — the purest as the most unselfish of human affections — is a barrier to *real* occultism. For whether we take as an example the holy love of a mother for her child, or that of a husband for his wife, even in these feelings, when analysed to the very bottom, and thoroughly sifted, there is still *selfishness* in the first, and an *égoïsme à deux* in the second instance.

What mother would not sacrifice without a moment’s hesitation hundreds and thousands of lives for that of the child of her heart?

What lover or true husband would not break the happiness of every other man and woman around him to satisfy the desire of one whom he loves?

This is but natural, we shall be told. Quite so; in the light of the code of human affections; less so, in that of divine universal love.

For, while the heart is full of thoughts for a little group of *selves*, near and dear to us, how shall the rest of mankind fare in our souls?

¹ *Ecclesiasticus* i, 9; Douay version. [The WMS equates “her” with “wisdom.”]

² *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie*, I p. 361. (Paris: G. Baillière, 1856 & 1861) [See p. 172 of A.E. Waite’s English translation (*op. cit.*, p. 27 fn.) — Boris de Zirkoff.]

³ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE DANGERS OF PRACTICAL MAGIC) XIV pp. 59-61

What percentage of love and care will there remain to bestow on the “great orphan”?

And how shall the “still small voice” make itself heard in a soul entirely occupied with its own privileged tenants?

What room is there left for the needs of Humanity *en bloc* to impress themselves upon, or even receive a speedy response?

And yet, he who would profit by the wisdom of the universal mind, has to reach it through *the whole of Humanity* without distinction of race, complexion, religion or social status. It is *altruism*, not *ego-ism* even in its most legal and noble conception, that can lead the unit to merge its little Self in the Universal Selves. It is to *these* needs and to this work that the true disciple of true Occultism has to devote himself, if he would obtain Theosophy, divine Wisdom and Knowledge.

The aspirant has to choose absolutely between the life of the world and the life of Occultism. It is useless and vain to endeavour to unite the two, for no one can serve two masters and satisfy both. No one can serve his body and the higher Soul, and do his family duty and his universal duty, without depriving either one or the other of its rights; for he will either lend his ear to the “still small voice” and fail to hear the cries of his little ones, or, he will listen but to the wants of the latter and remain deaf to the voice of Humanity. It would be a ceaseless, a maddening struggle for almost any married man, who would pursue true practical Occultism, instead of its *theoretical* philosophy. For he would find himself ever hesitating between the voice of the impersonal divine love of Humanity, and that of the personal, terrestrial love. And this could only lead him to fail in one or the other, or perhaps in both his duties. Worse than this. For, *whoever indulges after having pledged himself to OCCULTISM in the gratification of a terrestrial love or lust*, must feel an almost immediate result; that of being irresistibly dragged from the impersonal divine state down to the lower plane of matter. Sensual, or even mental self-gratification, involves the immediate loss of the powers of spiritual discernment; the voice of the MASTER can no longer be distinguished from that of one’s passions *or even that of a Dugpa*; the right from wrong; sound morality from mere casuistry.¹



¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (OCCULTISM VERSUS THE OCCULT ARTS) IX pp. 257-59

Addendum

First published in *Lucifer*, Vol. II (9), May 1888, pp. 257-58. Excerpt below from *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (PRACTICAL OCCULTISM) IX pp. 285-86.

In a very interesting article in last month's number entitled "Practical Occultism" it is stated that from the moment a "Master" begins to teach a "chela" he takes on himself all the sins of that chela in connection with the occult sciences until the moment when initiation makes the chela a master and responsible in his turn.

For the Western mind, steeped as it has been for generations in "Individualism," it is very difficult to recognise the justice and consequently the truth of this statement, and it is very much to be desired that some further explanation should be given for a fact which some few may feel intuitively but for which they are quite unable to give any logical reason. — S.E.

Response by H.P. Blavatsky.

The best logical reason for it is the fact that even in common daily life, parents, nurses, tutors, and instructors are generally held responsible for the habits and future ethics of a child. The little unfortunate wretch who is trained by his parents to pick pockets in the streets is not responsible for the sin, but the effects of it fall heavily on those who have impressed on his mind that it was the right thing to do. Let us hope that the Western Mind, although being "steeped in Individualism," has not become so dulled thereby as not to perceive that there would be neither logic nor justice were it otherwise. And if the moulders of the plastic mind of the yet unreasoning child must be held responsible, in this world of effects for his sins of omission and commission during his childhood and for effects produced by their early training in after-life, how much more the "Spiritual Guru"? The latter taking the student by the hand leads him into, and [286] introduces him to a world entirely unknown to the pupil. For this world is that of the invisible but ever-potent CAUSALITY, the subtle, yet never-breaking thread that is the action, agent, and power of Karma, and Karma itself in the field of divine mind. Once acquainted with this no adept can any longer plead ignorance in the event of even an action, good and meritorious in its *motive*, producing evil as its result; since acquaintance with this mysterious realm gives the means to the Occultist of foreseeing the two paths opening before every premeditated as unpremeditated action, and thus puts him in a position to know with certainty what will be the results in one or the other case. So long then, as the pupil acts upon this principle, but is too ignorant to be sure of his vision and powers of discrimination, is it not natural that it is the *guide* who should be responsible for the sins of him whom he has led into those dangerous regions?



Suggested reading for students.



More commonly confusing words.

- ADULTERY, LUST, MALICE
- ADYTUM AND ASYLUM
- AETHER AND ETHER
- AGNOSTICISM, ATHEISM, MONISM
- AION, ETERNITY, DURATION
- APPREHENSION AND COMPREHENSION
- ASTRAL LIGHT IS A TERM VERY LITTLE UNDERSTOOD
- AURA AND MAGNETISM
- BUDDHA AND PRINCE SIDDHARTHA BUDDHA
- BUDHISM IS INNER WISDOM
- CELIBACY, CONTINENCE, MONASTICISM
- CHEMIST AND ALCHEMIST
- CHILIASTS, MILLENNIUMISTS, MILLENARIANS
- DARKNESS IS INNER LIGHT
- DEVOTION, WORSHIP, LOYALTY
- EMANATION AND RADIATION
- EMBLEM AND SYMBOL
- GRAIKOS, HELLENE, HELLAS
- HIGHER SELF AND HIGHER EGO
- IMAGINATION AND IMITATION
- JIVA AND JIVATMAN
- JNANA AND YAJNA
- KAMIC VERSUS MANASIC ACTION
- KARMA AND KRIYA
- KARMA, NEMESIS, ADRASTEIA, THEMIS
- KOSMOS AND COSMOS

CONFUSING WORDS SERIES
SUGGESTED READING FOR STUDENTS

- KRONOS AND CHRONOS
- LAUGHTER, SMILES, TEARS
- LIGHT AND HEAT
- LUST, JEALOUSY, PHYSICAL LOVE
- MAGNETISM, MESMERISM, HYPNOTISM
- MATERIALISM, SPIRITUALISM, MONISM
- MUZIRIS, MNIZURIN, MNOUZIRIS
- NIRVANA AND PARINIRVANA
- PANTACLE AND PENTACLE
- RAJA AND RISHI
- REMEMBRANCE, RECOLLECTION, REMINISCENCE
- SKANDHA, SHLOKA, STANZA, SUTRA
- SPIRIT, SPIRITS, SPIRITUALISM
- SPIRITUALISM IS A PHILOSOPHY OF YESTERDAY
- SVABHAVA AND SVAYAMBHU
- TELETE, MYESIS, EPOPTeia
- THEOSOPHIST AND THEOSOPHER
- TRANSMIGRATION, REINCARNATION, GILGULIM
- TRIRATNA AND TRISHARANA
- TRUE AND FALSE PERSONALITY
- UNITY AND DUALITY
- VACH IS NOT MERE SPEECH
- VEDANTA, BUDDHISM, THEOSOPHY
- VRIL AND BOVRIL
- WILL AND DESIRE
- YOGIS AND MAHATMAS





Further reading.

- THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ARCANE TERMS, *in our Theosophy and Theosophists Series.*
- MAGIC OR THEURGY, PURPOSE AND PITFALLS, *in our Buddhas and Initiates Series.*
- THE PITFALLS OF OCCULT ARTS AND METAPHYSICAL HEALING, *in our Black versus White Magic Series.*

