

Chapter Two

THE ETERNAL ONE

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

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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)

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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*

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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,

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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.

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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 onto 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 exer-

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cise 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*

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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.