

the Light-bringer

Lucifer[®]

For seekers of Truth

Current topics viewed in the light of the Ancient Wisdom or Theo-sophia — the common source of all great world religions, philosophies and sciences

The universal symbolism of heroes, dwarfs, giants, snakes and dragons

The Master's helper and help from the Masters

The future of humanity and technology

An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth

Theosophical Platonists

Questions children ask, part 2



Cover illustration:

Photo of the Hindu temple *Pura Parahyangan Agung Jagatkarta* in West Java, Indonesia. The sides of the staircase consist of descending dragons, a symbol of wisdom and knowledge of the hidden forces in Nature, which we also find in the sacred buildings of many other ancient cultures.

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Bouke van den Noort



The Master's helper and help from the Masters

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Especially in the early days of The Theosophical Society, quite a few members longed to meet the Mahātmās and become disciples of them. However, the Masters often held off. Why did they do so? And with whom did they make contact?

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Our visit to the Prometheus Trust group in London gives us an ideal opportunity to tell more about their goals and activities, and about the ancient Platonic tradition in general.

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We live in times of rapid technological progress. But does this imply progress in our human evolution? What does the future of humanity look like, according to the universal wisdom? And what does this mean for the development of our technology now?

Erwin Bomas

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In our last issue, we wrote about questions children ask and how we can give appropriate answers to the sometimes very intuitive questions. In this issue we continue our column, with new questions.

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Editorial

We are all pilgrims. Every living being, each Soul is on a pilgrimage to become what it truly is. On this path we must conquer our selfish traits, the habits that only focus on ourselves. We must learn to let go of the materialistic veils we're periodically carrying. They are not who we truly are, and we must embrace brotherhood and live for the whole. We can only develop and move upwards through collaboration.

This journey is not one of randomness. Everything that lives does so according to Universal Laws such as Re-embodiment and the law of Cause and Effect. The latter pointing to strict justice in the Universe. The character of every human being and the conditions under which he or she lives, are the natural consequences of one's own actions and thinking in past lives. There is no such thing as good or bad luck.

Lucifer – the Light-bringer tries to help us pilgrims by offering practical ideas and tools to overcome the veils of illusion, spark our sense of wonderment and incite brotherhood.

In the article on universal symbolism, we talk about this inner Path to the Universe that heroes in myths and legends tread when they choose to live for the totality. On this path they must overcome their own lower nature. The dwarfs, giants, snakes and dragons in these stories each symbolize specific inner characteristics that must be understood and mastered.

The journey inwards may seem a solitary path. However, for those who strive with the right mindset, there is always the inspiration and outstretched hand of those who went this evolutionary journey before us: the Snakes and Dragons of Wisdom or in other words the Masters. The article *The Master's helper and help from the Masters* describes Robin Bennett, whose selfless inner light was pointed out by the Masters when some Theosophists rejected him because of his appearance.

Does technology help us on our Path, or does it distract us? In *The future of humanity and technology* we take a close look at technological development and its role in human evolution. Ideally, technology always serves to benefit a living being and ultimately the evolution of the whole, but whether this happens?

Furthermore, in this issue you will find a report from one of our editors on his visit to the Prometheus Trust in London. A lot of Plato's works have been translated from Greek into English by Thomas Taylor (1758-1835). This publishing house publishes many of his works and offers interesting public studies on the books and articles.

We experience things that we find pleasant, and we experience events that we find unpleasant. Often, the unpleasant events are considered unjust or unfair, and many times revenge is sought when people are involved. All are Karma though — but the old motto 'an eye for an eye' still exists. Why has this way of responding to injustice persisted for so long?

We will continue with questions from children. You can find some of the answers given on the question raised in our previous issue: "Why is it warm in the earth?" and we challenge you with three new questions.

In our questions and answers we take a closer look at Krishna, the charioteer and wise counselor of Arjuna, the archer from the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. How can we see Krishna?

We hope that this *Lucifer* may inspire us to continue on our common pilgrimage. To move forward, we need each other. That is why we appreciate your questions and comments. They will help shape the goal of a practical brotherhood among all people. Every email to us will be answered.

The editors



The universal symbolism of heroes, dwarfs, giants, snakes and dragons

Almost every mythological story features a hero. This hero often has to defeat a dragon, a snake or giant. But in some stories, he actually gets help from giants and dragons. How can this be reconciled? What is the meaning of this universal symbolism and why can it be found in practically every tradition all over the world?

In this article we follow the hero's adventure on his path of inner growth as he encounters giants, dwarfs, snakes and dragons, all of whom fulfil a specific function at some point on this inner journey. This article is an edited version of the lecture Bouke van den Noort gave on April 30th, 2023, in the series *Universal symbols: the language of the soul*.

Key thoughts

» There is an inner Path to the Heart of the Universe that the hero in myths and legends treads, the moment he makes the final choice to dedicate his life in service of the whole.

» It is a path of self-conquest, where the hero must face the tendencies of his own lower nature and master his selfish habits and character traits.

» Giants, dwarfs, snakes and dragons each symbolize specific inner characteristics that must be conquered or mastered.

» On this seemingly solitary path, there is always the inspiration and outstretched hand of those who went this evolutionary journey before us: the Snakes and Dragons of Wisdom.

Universal Symbolism: the language of the soul

Symbolism can be found in various kinds and forms. From road signs at an airport to ancient symbols like the circle or the cross. What these ancient symbols have in common is the message within, the deeper meaning behind the external form that is meant to be expressed. This article is about *universal* symbolism, symbolism of the different religious and philosophical traditions and civilizations around the world and of all ages. The fact that we do find the same symbolism all over the world, such as that of the snake [see text box on page 72], is already a first hint of it being universal.

But this universality does not only refer to the fact that a symbol is found worldwide. More fundamental, is the *characteristic* of the message hidden

behind the external symbol, which is of a universal quality. And a third aspect making it universal, is the fact that its message can only truly be fathomed by the universal aspect *within us*.

One common source: Theosophia

The fact that ancient symbols are found worldwide, expressing the same message, makes it no longer possible to ignore the fact that we are dealing with universal symbolism. The question now is: how is it possible that we encounter the same symbolism in all these different places and time periods in the world? This is not a matter of coincidence, but of the fact that all these manifestations have one and the same source, i.e. the Universal Wisdom of the Theosophia. The Divine Wisdom that is

periodically brought into the world by messengers, by the forerunners of humanity: initiates who have already unveiled more of this Universal Wisdom within themselves, and who have taken upon themselves the duty to help humanity by continuously revealing facets of that Wisdom. That is, only those teachings humanity is ready to receive at a particular time and age.

The language of the soul

The difficulty, however, that all those messengers are facing is how to convey Divine Wisdom using human language, which by definition is too limited to express this wisdom. Simply because it transcends our everyday capac-

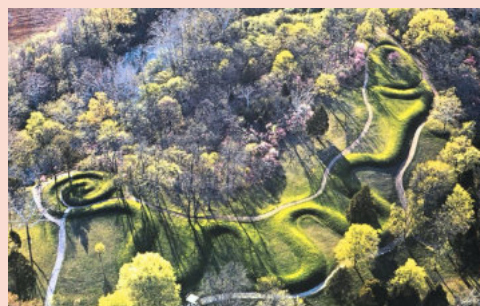
ity of expression. Yet it is not impossible, because every person is more than his brain-mind. Symbolism is also referred to as the language of the soul, and this is so because our soul encompasses more than our everyday consciousness. That 'more' could be called the universal part of our soul. The inner part of our soul by which we fathom directly the deeper meaning of something. By which we can see the interconnectedness of life and the causality of everything. It is our faculty of understanding that enables us to have an unveiled view of reality with an inner clarity or instant vision of reality. And it is this higher part of our soul, also called intuition, that symbolism is appealing to, enabling us to understand these universal truths.

Universal symbolism of the snake

The snake is one of the universal symbols found in all times and places around the world. Among the ancient Greeks, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, is accompanied by a snake. Also Hermes, the messenger of the gods, has a rod with intertwined snakes, the Caduceus. Derived from this is the staff of the god of medicine Asclepius, now used as a symbol by the *World Health Organization*. The Sumerians in Mesopotamia also used the symbol of the intertwined serpent to signify divine wisdom. And in Egypt, the original Pharaohs, the king initiates, as a reflection of divine wisdom on earth, had a serpent attached on their crown (see illustration on page 71). Similar to this, the sages in India are called Nāgas, which literally means snakes. Throughout Europe, you come across the snake on megalithic monuments such as at Newgrange in Ireland and in Scotland, where a monument called the *Serpent Stone* is found. In a lake in Spain, a prehistoric monument called the Spanish Stonehenge, surfaces during extremely dry summers, and there too, snakes are engraved in stones.

In the Scandinavian Eddas, we find the Midgard serpent encircling the world tree by biting its own tail, and underneath the tree of life the dragon Nidhogg gnawing at the roots. Dragons and snakes represent the same symbolism, although dragons are more common in Eastern traditions. Like the dragon of wisdom in China, or the descending dragons of the Hindu temple *Pura Parahyangan Agung Jagatkarta* ('pure divine nature') in West Java, Indonesia.

The same symbolism we also encounter at the very other side of the world, in both Americas. In Mexico, for instance, you find the famous pyramid of the feathered serpent Quetzalcoatl, descending from higher realms of consciousness, showing strong resemblance with the descending dragons of the Hindu temple in West Java. In North America, in Ohio, you can still see the remains of the *Great Serpent Mound*, of the native indigenous inhabitants, which displays a snake with an egg in its mouth. And again, the exact same symbol of a snake and the 'mundane egg' you find among both the Ancient Greeks and India.



From left to right: *Serpent Stone* at Newgrange, Ireland, Hindu temple *Pura Parahyangan Agung Jagatkarta* in West Java, Indonesia and the *Great Serpent Mound* in Ohio, North America.

Veiled and protected

And therefore, simultaneously, symbolism has a function of concealment as well. Of veiling truth from those who are so focused on the external side of things and self-interest, that they cannot reach that higher part in themselves, and thus are not able to grasp the deeper meaning. And this provides at the same time a natural protection against abuse of this knowledge for selfish purposes.

This protection is closely related to the compassionate modus operandi of the so-called Mystery Schools, the spiritual centers founded by the Great Teachers of humanity. From the moment we became so materially and selfishly oriented, the need arose to veil the universal knowledge from the masses.

And it is these Mystery Schools, these spiritual focal points on earth, from which the countless expressions of symbolism, such as that of the serpent, have been brought out into the world. Symbols stimulating every person to think more deeply, to search for more wisdom, without giving access to knowledge to those who are not ethically ready to receive it.

While each symbol was adapted to, and colored by, the culture and civilization of that time and place, they all had the same Universal Wisdom as their fountain source. So does this apply to the five symbols of this article: heroes, dwarfs, giants, snakes and dragons.

Together they cover a gigantic field of theosophical teachings, and if you look for them in Madame Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*, you will find yourself in an ocean of religious and mythological stories, in which you can easily drown. Frequently she cites several traditions on one page, jumping from the Bible to the Eddas, and via the Mesopotamians back to Hinduism or the pre-Inca period. But after all, this was exactly one of the tasks she had, to show the similarities, to bring together all those scattered fragments like pieces of a puzzle and demonstrate that they form one consistent whole and are actually different expressions of the exact same fundamental source.

Universal principles

In order not to get lost in the many details, we will first start with some general principles, universal keys that are necessary, or at least very helpful to understand symbolism.

The first key is: *never try to "pinpoint" symbols intellectually.* As mentioned, the language of the soul transcends our everyday consciousness and therefore also our intellectual

faculty. That part of us that is all too eager to categorize things, to define and assign exact meanings to symbols asserting: it is exactly this and not that.

But if there is one thing you can be sure of when studying symbolism in *The Secret Doctrine*, it is the fact that you will lose track completely by having a purely intellectual approach. This is also why the book is called *The Secret Doctrine*, simply because you will never be able to grasp the deeper meaning this way. With a pure intellectual approach concepts crystallize, resulting in loss of the deeper, inner meaning. Or great confusion arises, because elements seemingly contradict each other.

The second key is always to be watchful for the *level of consciousness* to which the symbolism applies. Generally speaking, you can distinguish three levels to which this symbolism can apply: the cosmic level, the level of the planet or entire humanity, and the level of the individual human being. It is therefore always important to keep a close eye on what the symbol refers to. For example, in Greek mythology there is the cosmic Zeus as the spiritual source of the universe, the hierarch of all gods; there is Zeus who symbolizes humanity at a certain stage of development; and there is Zeus as a hothead arguing with the Titan Prometheus, where he symbolizes the lower nature of the individual man.

In short, the context in which a symbol is used is always essential. And that is precisely one of the veils that appeals to our faculty of discernment, by which we can understand what a symbol in a specific context refers to.

The importance of context also applies to the next key, the fact that symbolism is often *dual*. And this is new compared to abstract symbolism.

This is especially true of the symbols we are discussing in this article, because they do not concern objects or abstractions but *living beings*. For there are two sides, two poles to living beings: a consciousness side and a matter side, a higher and a lower aspect, in other words, a so-called 'good' and 'evil' side. In myths, you come across giants who are benevolent and kind to us, and giants who oppose us. Dwarfs who are helpful but also dwarfs who actually harm us. There are snakes and dragons that tempt us to immoral behavior and snakes and dragons that inspire us to spiritual development. Such as, for example, the snake in the Bible, which on the one hand is portrayed as a tempter to evil, and on the other hand as a benevolent force when Jesus makes the statement: "Be wise as serpents."

A final key, especially when it comes to giants and dwarfs, is that this symbolism is from *our perspective* and current stage of development. And that applies to both physical size and quality of consciousness. Giants can refer to beings that are far ahead of us in the development of consciousness, but also to the fact that in previous stages of evolution, we humans were literally bigger than we are today. That physical size was “normal” at the time, but from our current perspective it was huge. Dwarfs, in turn, can represent beings that are in a very primitive developmental stage of consciousness compared to our human consciousness. In our view, their development is ‘dwarf-like’ small. But a combination of these is also possible, as we will see later: giants that are physically bigger, but in terms of mentality far behind compared to our current stage of consciousness.

The Hero

Let us start with the symbol that is closest to us, the hero in myths, legends and fairy tales. Who is this hero? It is us: the awakening human soul during its journey of evolutionary development. But it may be evident that this hero status cannot simply be attributed to all human beings, for this we have to meet certain requirements. Characteristics or qualities that sometimes may seem subtle, but that make the fundamental difference between the ordinary man and the hero.

How the hero distinguishes himself from the ordinary man has everything to do with a choice, the choice to go the path of inner development self-consciously and thus accelerated, for the benefit of humanity, so with the motive to be a helping force in the world. And this choice is not one made overnight, but a final decision followed after an inner process in which a number of important phases can be distinguished.

Vision

And it all starts with vision. “The difference”, says one of the Theosophical teachers, between the man living the ordinary life and the disciple on the path [the hero; BvdN] “is just a difference in spiritual, intellectual and psychical outlook” on life.⁽¹⁾ That is, the ability to see through the illusion of separateness, realizing that life is rooted in the same spiritual source, being fundamentally one.

But vision alone is, of course, not enough. It starts with that, but over time this vision grows, and your attention shifts more and more from a focus on yourself, to a focus on the world around you, until you arrive to the point that

you identify yourself to such extent with all life around you, that you identify with the fate of the world.

The final choice

At the very moment this realization has sunk in, filling the heart of the hero with compassion and a clarity that he is an inseparable part of the whole, a fundamental choice is made: the decision to commit one hundred percent to this unity and to humanity. The decision to put yourself in service for the well-being of humanity and all life around you. The decision to work for the totality. And if this decision is sincere, taken with inner conviction, then a corresponding course of action will naturally follow.

Being the example

And that brings us to the final step of the practical application, of being the living example by putting your intended decision into practice. And this is the moment where all heroic stories begin. This is the moment where the challenges and trials appear on the path, by which the hero’s willpower and commitment to that decision is put to the test.

At that very moment the battle begins, as described in the *Bhagavad Gita*, in which the hero Arjuna, armed with his bow on the battlefield is facing an army, ready to do battle. But in that army, he suddenly recognizes friends and relatives... symbolizing his own weaknesses, his own karmic legacy so to say of old habits that he has to overcome before he can move along on the Path. And that is why symbolism of the struggling hero always concerns an *inner fight*, and hence it is a path of *self-conquest*.

Giants

The next universal symbol found all over the world is that of the giant. Giants appear in fairy tales and legends, as well as in countless religious writings such as the Bible, the Indian *Mahābhārata*, the Eddas and Babylonian scriptures.

In almost all these cases, the giants are engaged in a battle, either against gods, or among themselves, or against humans. In certain cases this concerns a historical battle that has actually taken place, but in all other cases it is metaphor to convey the idea of a certain characteristic prevailing over another, one quality becoming dominant over the other. In other words, that humanity is entering another phase of development. Sometimes the two are combined in case a scripture is based on actual historical facts, but also contains a symbolic meaning.

The reason why we encounter so much battle and struggle in symbolism, is because it was most easily understood by humanity of the time. A time when battle among civilizations was much more common (today we try to solve problems more through dialogue) and therefore the best metaphor to signify the prevailing of one aspect 'the good' over another 'evil'.

In case of giants too, the symbolism applies to the previously mentioned three levels of consciousness. For it can relate to 1) cosmic processes, 2) to events concerning all of humanity, and finally 3) to ourselves, aspects *within* the individual human being that that giant represents.

The cosmic giant

If we start at the cosmic level, with the cosmogonies in the different world traditions, the first giant to appear in the Eddas is Ymir. Ymir represents the material side of the universe, but not yet the manifested universe as we can physically perceive it. It refers to cosmic primordial matter, one of the two poles of spirit and matter, which are the first to form at the start of the re-appearance of a universe. As it goes in battle stories, the giant Ymir is killed by some of the gods. From his various body parts, the various parts of the cosmos and eventually the earth are made. His skull for example becomes the heavens, his sweat the oceans, and from his bones and teeth the mountains are created. Symbolically, this can be explained as follows: during the process of unfoldment of the universe from the inner realms, the cosmic primordial matter forms the different worlds that come into being during its descent through the various realms of being.

But this formation-process does not happen by itself, it requires an underlying, formative force or consciousness that works with or through this material side. And this is where we find the first giants in Greek mythology: the Titans *in their function of kosmocratores*, which literally means 'builders of worlds'. The divine forces or Dhyān-Chohans, who as the Masons of the Worlds, work in the vehicular or matter side of nature, building the universe.

A similar symbology we find in the Hindu Purāṇas, which speaks of 'the celestial war' between the giants and the gods: the battle between the Asuras and Devas, who in their turn respectively symbolize the matter and spirit side. In *The Secret Doctrine*, it is hinted that the first of these wars takes place even before the solar system came into existence.⁽²⁾ For there is also a *second battle* taking place between the Asuras and the Devas, mirroring the first on a lower plane ('as above so below'), but now within the solar

system when it is already manifested. And this battle too is not to be taken literally, but as a metaphor for the dynamic interaction between higher and lower beings on that particular plane: signifying a transformation, a change of consciousness taking place.

Giants of the planetary level

Now we have descended to the planetary level, to a battle of giants taking place on the inner regions of the solar system, eventually reaching down all the way to us, to humanity on earth.

A battle among others symbolized by the ancient Greeks as the fight between the Titans and the gods on Olympus, when the Titans rebelled against the gods.

And one of the Titans in this category we know as Prometheus, who gets in conflict with Zeus because he stole the fire from heaven to give it to humanity. Another example is the demigod Tantalus, who stole nectar and ambrosia from the gods to give this divine food to the mortals, and as punishment was sent to the underworld by Zeus.

This symbology of 'rebellious', represents the stage of development of humanity in the so-called 'Lemurian' age. A time when our thinking faculty became active, stimulated, being sparked by these Titans, beings of advanced consciousnesses far ahead of us. In the Hindu tradition they are also called Mānasaputras, beings of exalted spiritual quality who descended to our terrestrial realm to help awaken the minds of humanity. Now, it is this descent into a lower realm of consciousness that the symbolism of 'rebellious against the gods' refers to. Because the quality of this lower realm is 'in conflict' with the spiritual quality of those Titans. And the exact same symbolism you find in the Bible with the Fallen Angels and Lucifer the Light-bringer, of which the symbolic meaning over time has entirely degenerated to a symbol of evil, only because the inner meaning of this actually very compassionate event of helping humanity has been lost completely.

Giants within humanity

Again, we descend a little further to our physical earth, to yet another war of giants taking place, but now within humanity itself. It is the before mentioned historical battle that literally took place at the end of a time-period in our own history in which we were at the top of our material development, and therefore at an all-time low of our spiritual development. A time of spiritual bareness, as Plato calls it, due to our very strong focus on matter. A period in

which the attraction to matter was strongest, mentally as well as physically. In other words, humanity was in its puberty and physically we were very big and strong. And this is the giant we encounter in all the fairy tales and legends: big and clumsy, not too clever but very strong. A reference to our former selves in the Atlantic phase following the Lemurian in which we became active thinkers. And in this battle as well, there is duality in which we can distinguish two types of giants, the laggards, the Atlanteans just described, called Daytias in Indian mythology, and the forerunners, the Devatas, meaning semi-divine, who stand for the Teachers of humanity. The initiates and adepts who are the representatives so to speak, of the category of Titans to which Prometheus belongs, fulfilling their task a level lower in the hierarchy of helpers of humanity.

This struggle between the giants who became ever more material-orientated, and the spiritual progenitors of humanity of our present phase (which succeeded the Atlantic phase), is the main theme of the Hindu epics the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana* for example. A battle that actually took place hundreds of thousands of years ago, among others in India, ancient Greece and around the Nile Delta. This may all sound a bit fanciful and far distanced, but today we can still see the concrete traces of this transitional phase in the form of megalithic and cosmic monuments in various places around the world. Monuments constructed by initiates at the beginning of our current era succeeding

the Atlantean phase.⁽³⁾ Along with these, we know the primitive Atlantic statues of Easter Island, the very ancient remains of a Lemurian-Atlantic people, and the gigantic Bamyān Buddhas in Afghanistan. The latter, which unfortunately were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001, even depicting multiple stages of development, from large to small. In conclusion, when reading about battling giants, whether Titans, Daityas, Devatas or Asuras, it is always important to look at the context in order to determine what the battle symbolically signifies. But in general, it is safe to say that at whatever level the battle refers to, it is always one between spirit and matter, between higher and lower consciousness, between relative good and evil, or, in relation to human beings: between the relative unselfish and selfish.

Giants in relation to the Hero

Now that we know the specific characteristics the giant symbolically stands for, we can also better understand how the giant relates to the hero. If a battle is taking place between the two, it always concerns an *inner* battle. A battle between the hero's selfish and unselfish impulses. It is the fight between the Atlantean and the Titan *within us*, so to speak. The battle of self-conquest, of overcoming our own self-centered and materially oriented habits of Atlantean characteristic, that actually belong to our past. As long as the hero has not yet overcome these Atlantean habits of old, he holds himself back from progressing on the inner path.



Two examples of megalithic statues of humans in which clearly the two categories can be distinguished: the laggards and forerunners. On the left the rather clumsy statues of the Atlanteans on Easter Island with primitive features and an average height of five meters. And on the right the forerunners, the human Buddhas also referred to as the Sons of God. Each major developmental cycle in humanity is started and overseen by a specific Buddha. The two depicted here, 55 and 38 meters tall stood in Bamiyan, Afghanistan. Both the Easter Island and Afghanistan statues were made at the end of the Atlantic phase, according to Theosophy.

Dwarfs

Along with giants, we also encounter dwarfs in myths and legends in the many traditions around the world. Dwarfs who are considered small *from our perspective*, as is the case with giants. But in the case of dwarfs, it concerns solely the level of consciousness development. For dwarfs symbolize very primitive beings, far behind us, at the beginning of their evolutionary development. This is the reason why we usually do not see them fighting in myths and fairy tales, because they are still fully *unselfconscious*, not knowing good or evil, right or wrong.

Dwarfs are actually part of a whole group of fairytale characters you come across as elves, trolls' fairies, goblins etcetera, who collectively are also called *nature spirits*.

And this group as a whole symbolizes the forces of nature that are being shaped by those elemental building blocks, even more primitive than the mineral kingdom, and which in Theosophy are called elementals. They are so to speak the "executors" of forces known as electricity and magnetism, but also phenomena like heat, for example. In fact, all processes in which forces are involved. So, whenever we start the car, cook our food or simply lift our arm, we make use of these elementals. Even when we are thinking, because thoughts too are elementals.

Since we make use of them, you often find dwarfs in a supporting role, as a positive force. But that is not necessarily always the case, because dwarfs too have this dual nature of good and bad. Think for instance of the element fire, we positively make use of when we are cooking, if we do not control it, the results could be undesirable like a burned down house. Or electricity, which is almost indispensable in our modern life, but in certain cases it can be destructive and fatal. And just so there are positive and negative thoughts. So in principle, dwarfs represent the unselfconscious, neutral forces of nature. And depending on the situation and how we use them, they can be positive or negative *in relation to us*. In other words: friendly or unfriendly dwarfs. Within the group of nature spirits dwarfs are part of, they represent a specific characteristic. For this group can be divided into the four categories of the elements fire, air, water and earth. According to the classification of among others Paracelsus, the salamanders represent the element fire, the sylphs the element air, the undines (water nymphs) the element water and the gnomes the element earth. It is this latter category of gnomes to which the dwarfs can be considered, and in which you can also clearly see the characteristic of this earth element in various fairy tales and myths.

As for example the seven dwarfs in the fairy tale of Snow White, who are mining jewels underground in mines. Or dwarfs keeping underground treasures, like the goblins in the Harry Potter books, guarding money and treasures in the underground bank Gringotts.



Dwarfs symbolize the nature spirits of the element earth.

Dwarfs in relation to the Hero

If we consider what the symbolism of dwarfs means in regards to the hero, it is interesting to look at the Greek origin of the word gnome, which is *gnōmē*, meaning thinking or intelligence. If we combine this with the element earth, it becomes clear what challenge the hero faces, for how does he apply his intelligence? Is it concentrated on acquiring earthly treasures or on spiritual fortune? In other words, is he able to control the dwarfs, his earthly thought-elementals?

A well-known example where this is clearly not the case, is the folk tale of the sorcerer's apprentice who, out of laziness, enchants a broomstick to do the work for him. An act that gets completely out of hand because he cannot control the broomsticks – his elementals – because he lacks control over them. This once again emphasizes the importance of the pure, unselfish motive the hero must have, when faced with his own earthly elementals, in order to be able to control them. In having the dwarfs to obey him, so mastering his thoughts of material wealth.

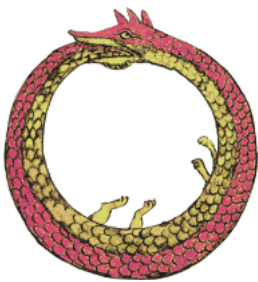
Snakes and Dragons

Finally, we will discuss the symbolism of snakes and dragons which, as mentioned above, can be seen as synonymous. A symbolism that is said to be one of the oldest

and to which, because of its age, perhaps the most meanings are attributed – from the most divine characteristics of cosmic consciousness to the lowest aspects of the individual human being. Therefore, one finds good and evil snakes among all traditions, of which both the hero will encounter on the inner Path.

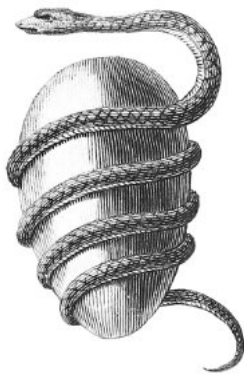
The Serpent, Infinity and Cyclic Growth

Perhaps one of the most famous snake symbols is the snake biting its own tail. Variants of this can be found all over the world, such as the Ouroboros of the ancient Greeks. By biting its own tail, beginning and end come together, merging into each other, making it a closed circle and therefore a symbol of *infinity*. The eternity of life without beginning or end.



Ouroboros.

But this symbol has yet another meaning: the head and tail of the snake or dragon are also attributed to the characteristics active and passive, making it also a symbol of *cyclicality* or *re-embodiment*. The cyclical motion of life of alternating periods of activity and passivity, or rest. During the active phase we gain experiences, we learn lessons and develop a little more each time. Therefore, this symbol has another third meaning: that of *evolution* or progressive development. And this aspect is also metaphorically reflected in the fact that snakes shed their skin. Symbolically this stands for the growth phases during which they shed the old skin, replacing it for a new one.



The Orphic egg (the cosmos), being brooded by the serpent.

Based on this universal meaning, we also find the snake in creation stories or cosmogonies as the *source of life*: the Cosmic serpent with the world egg in its mouth. The egg being the universe in germ preceding its emanational unfolding, brought forth by the serpent. In Hindu philosophy, this egg is known as the Egg of Brahmā, from which the manifested universe emerges and unfolds itself stage by stage. But we also find this symbolism among the native inhabitants of North America at the *Great Serpent Mound*, where a snake is depicted holding an egg in its mouth (see photo on page 72). And the very same idea of the serpent and the world egg is also found among the Ancient Greeks with their Orphic egg, encircled by the cosmic serpent, as its source or guardian.



Vishnu resting on the serpent Śesha.

In a somewhat different but similar representation, we find the cosmic serpent Śesha in the Indian Puranas in, on which the god Vishnu rests during the period of inactivity between the manifestations of the universe. Śesha is said to symbolize infinite time in space, concealing in its seven heads all the karmic seeds of the universe-in-the-making.

The serpent as spirit and matter

Descending a little further into the development process of the universe, when the germ has blossomed and the worlds have appeared, we come to the symbol of the Caduceus: two intertwined snakes around a staff. In its cosmic meaning, this symbolizes the evolution of all life. The head of the staff formed by the cosmic serpent is the source. And similar to the giants, where Ymir represents the primordial matter, and the Titans as builders of worlds represent the consciousness side, the two snakes represent the two poles in Nature of spirit and matter.

Descending from the source, the tails of the two serpents spiral downwards, and each time they cross, spirit and



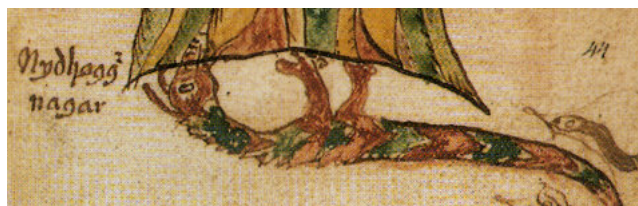
Caduceus.

matter come together. Each intersection representing a different plane of being in the universe, built up through the cooperation of spirit and matter of the respective plane, all the way down to our manifested earth where the two tails join.

Snakes and dragons of the underworld

In this symbolism of the two types of snakes of the Caduceus lies also the explanation for the fact that the hero in myths and legends often has to defeat a snake or dragon. For if we follow the snake that symbolizes the material side downwards, descending further and further through the different planes of being, we eventually arrive at the poisonous snake of the underworld: the lower regions of the earthly astral realm.

This is the symbolic dragon's den. The realm of the serpent Nidhogg from the Eddas, where, according to one of the Eddic poems treacherous men, murderers, and evil-doers roam after death, whom Nidhogg preys upon with his poisonous fangs.



The serpent Nidhogg continually gnaws at the roots of Yggdrasil, the Tree of Life.

But those murderers and deceivers do not just get there by chance. The reason they end up in the underworld is karmic attraction, for they have cultivated the corresponding characteristic within themselves during this and previous lives. Because according to the axiom 'as above so

below', we too, like the earth, have a lower astral part. The lower aspect of our animal nature, from which all our selfish desires and impulses originate. And *this* is the dragon the hero must defeat: his own inner dragon consisting of all egocentric tendencies, desires and emotions such as hatred, anger and jealousy, which we must sooner or later deal with when they appear on our path. But how do we do that? Because going into battle with something means establishing a connection with it, and that is exactly the opposite of what is intended. But as previously mentioned, the metaphor of defeating the enemy stands for the fact that one characteristic becomes leading over the other, *mastering* the other. That is the essence here. For we must not get rid of our lower nature, but rather educate and ennoble it through proper guidance, so that it becomes a useful, serving instrument.



Saint George and the dragon, for explanation see text below.

This idea is wonderfully depicted in the legend of Saint George and the Dragon, in which the hero George must defeat a dragon. In his one hand, he is holding a spear, symbolizing the spiritual willpower by which he is able to subdue the dragon. In his other hand he holds the reins of the horse, the white horse symbolizing the part of his animal nature that he has already mastered and made docile,

and therefore holding the reins of. Notice the subtlety here that the spear is not aimed at the dragon's heart, but at its mouth. For George does not kill the dragon but silences it. He kills the *dominance* of the dragon you might say, by which it becomes docile like the horse. For the dragon is just as much a part of us, as suggested by the dragon's tail wrapped around the horse's hind leg, indicating our connectedness to it.

Defeating snakes and dragons by the Hero

In conclusion, when dragons and snakes are defeated by the hero, it always concerns an *inner process* of ennobling or elevating one's own lower nature. It is the self-conquest of the hero during trials, one of the hero's required capabilities mentioned before of not giving in to the temptations of the lower nature, but through inner wisdom, by spiritual willpower and loyalty, holding on to the inner decision to dedicate yourself to the totality.

And consequently, by having these inner qualities leading, the animal nature or our lower self will naturally follow.

Snakes and dragons of Wisdom

But we are not alone in our endeavor. And that brings us finally to the Snakes and Dragons of Wisdom, the other snake of the Caduceus representing the spirit-side. The snake, in its descent from the spiritual source through the various planes of consciousness, representing the unbroke line of spiritual beings, of Buddhas of Compassion. From Celestial Buddhas all the way to human Buddhas, who have their range of influence or activity here on earth. Particularly interesting in this context is the Greek origin of the word dragon: δράκων, which means "he who oversees" or "he who sees and watches over". For in this cooperation of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, each of them has taken on the responsibility of supporting all life within the realm or span of consciousness he can oversee. In this lineage, each Buddha is always a reflection on a lower plain of the one above.

That is the reason why Lao-Tse, for instance, was called a Dragon of Wisdom by Confucius, because as an initiate here on earth he was ultimately a reflection of the cosmic Dragon of Wisdom. But Lao-tse, of course, is just one example of the many the world teachers and messengers. Of all those sages and initiates, Light Bringers in true sense, for having already successfully gone the Path before us – enlightened with the buddhic splendor – they turned around to help struggling humanity to reach that same state. And so, it is these progenitors, these Great Teachers

of humanity, who over centuries have founded the mystery schools, from which universal symbolism is being brought out time and again to inspire us. To encourage us in the language of the soul to tread the inner Path by self-induced effort. It is up to us now, to recognize this help, to understand the language of the soul, follow the directions, and tread this Path on our own inner strength.

Summary

To summarize it, all one can say is that there is a Path leading inwards, an inner Path to the Heart of the Universe that we all travel along in our evolutionary journey. A Path that we, as the hero, go consciously and we accelerated the moment we make the choice to dedicate ourselves to the service of the totality.

A path of self-conquest, where we have to deal with the laggard giants of Atlantis, our own, in the past created selfish habits. A Path on which the dwarfs – our earthly, materialistic thoughts – must be mastered, in order to be able to subdue the inner dragon of our animal nature with a pure and selfless mind and educate it to become a useful instrument.

But all along this journey, with every step, always inspired and encouraged by the great noble Titans and the Snakes and Dragons of Wisdom, who having entered the Path before us, continuously offer us the outstretched hand.

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Robin Bennett

The Master's helper and help from the Masters

Especially in the early days of The Theosophical Society, quite a few members longed to meet the Mahātmās and become disciples (*chelas*) of them. Few, however, could claim contact with the 'Brothers', as they were called. Why did this not happen? Are there criteria for such contact? If so, which ones? Must you live a pure life, know the teachings well, or is it about something else?

The Mahātmā letters are, for several reasons, very fascinating and inspiring literature for anyone who wishes to delve seriously into Theosophy. Apart from the cooperation the Masters had with their specific chelas, thanks to the intermediation of H.P. Blavatsky, a correspondence arose between initially two Englishmen living in British India – after a short time it became only A.P. Sinnett – and two Masters. The instructive value is certainly not only in the 'technical teachings', although there is much about that in the letters, but also about how the Mahātmās guide humanity from their position and how, if we have the right mindset, we can be the Masters' helpers.

Helper and help from the Masters

Anyone who has his heart in the right place, who thinks and acts courageously, without prejudice and, above all, selflessly, is a helper of the Masters and is helped by the Masters for that reason. External matters, like

social position and scholarship, play no part in this. Even one's outlook on life is an afterthought, provided, of course, that it is sincere, does not seek personal gain and is primarily based on universal brotherhood. The Masters do not look on the outside but see within. And when they discern the right mentality, they approach that person. Mahātmā Koothoomi (K.H.) makes this clear in no uncertain terms in a letter to A.P. Sinnett:

Nature has linked all parts of her Empire together by subtle threads of magnetic sympathy, and, there is a mutual correlation even between a star and a man; thought runs swifter than the electric fluid, and your thought *will find me* if projected by a pure impulse, as mine will find, has found, and often impressed your mind. We may move in cycles of activity divided — not entirely separated from each other. Like the light in the sombre valley seen by the mountaineer from his peaks, every bright thought in your

Key thoughts

» When the selfless, inner light shines in a human being, he is noticed by the Masters.

» The Masters look at the inner, not the outer man.

» A pure life alone is no reason for contact with the Masters. It is mainly about unselfish and compassionate work for the benefit of fellow human beings.

mind, my Brother, will sparkle and attract the attention of your distant friend and correspondent. If thus we discover our natural allies in the Shadow-world – your world and ours outside the precincts – and it is our law to approach every such an one if even there be but the feeblest glimmer of the true ‘Tathagata’ light within him — then how far easier for you to attract us.⁽²⁾

What is a Mahātma?

‘Great Soul’ or ‘Great Self’ is the meaning of this Sanskrit compound word. The Mahātmans are perfect Men, relatively speaking, whom Theosophists commonly call Teachers, Elder Brothers, Masters, Sages, Seers, and by other names. They are indeed the ‘Elder Brothers’ of mankind: they are men, not spirits; they are men who have evolved through self-devised efforts in individual evolution, always advancing forwards and upwards until they have now attained the lofty spiritual and intellectual human supremacy that now they hold.⁽¹⁾

Tathāgata light

Core idea in the above quote is *Tathāgata*. This Sanskrit word literally means, ‘thus gone, thus come’. It is used as a title for Buddhas of Compassion, such as Gautama. It expresses the spiritual and especially compassionate nature of these great men who follow in each other’s footsteps for the sake of humanity. A human being who has ignited something of the Tathāgata light within him is therefore a one who has taken his first steps on this Path of Compassion. He has awakened something of his own *buddhi nature* and is working in the very spirit of the Buddhas of Compassion.

If we allow the Master’s words to penetrate us properly, we can realize that every human being who sincerely practices compassion comes into contact with the Masters, although in most cases he or she will hardly be aware of it.

Helper of the Masters

So coming into contact with the Mahātmans does not necessarily mean that the one who has placed himself under the Master’s influence knows this himself. And it certainly does not imply personal gain or that, because of that contact, you develop more quickly spiritually. On the contrary, compassion implies that you are not striving for personal gain. It is about the whole.

Therefore, one who *truly* practices compassion will not only come under the influence of the Masters, he will in turn support the Masters in their compassionate work. He

is one of their helpers.

Thereby it is completely unimportant what he implies to be true, what he believes, what his caste or social position is. The Masters never judge people by the external, or what they *appear* to be. They look at what man is *inwardly*.

In public opinion a person may be an outcast, an inferior person, but if he lives courageously from compassion, he can be a useful helper for the Masters. Or as Master Koothoomi speaks of the American Bennett: he is an agent of us.⁽³⁾

Robin Bennett

Robin Mortimer Bennett was an American freethinker and editor of the magazine *The Truth Seeker*. He was a controversial figure in the United States. He had openly criticized Christian dogmatics, which had not been received with favor.

A member of a Christian association in New York filed a sham case against him, and he was sentenced in prison for a year. This was despite the fact that 100,000 people had signed a petition pleading his innocence. The petition for release was sent to then-President of the United States, Rutherford B. Hayes, but had no effect.

After his imprisonment, he made a world tour. He visited Bombay, where at the time H.P. Blavatsky and Henry S. Olcott had established the headquarters of the Theosophical Society (T.S.). Olcott initially did not want to accept him as a member of the T.S., fearing that his bad reputation would reflect on the T.S. But Helena Blavatsky didn’t care about reputations and convinced Olcott to approve his membership. Even the Masters, who were never concerned with who did or did not join the T.S., agreed to his application and he became a member. Olcott later frankly and generously admitted that he had initially misjudged.⁽⁴⁾ Bennett eventually wrote three thick books on the various religions of the East under the title *A Truth-Seeker Around the World*. Volume 4 was planned, but because he died prematurely, he was unable to finish it. Blavatsky wrote a rave review of this vast project in the magazine she edited, *The Theosophist*.⁽⁵⁾

Body odor and moral odor

It may arouse surprise that Master Koothoomi calls the freethinker Bennett an *agent*. A freethinker is someone who rejects all dogmatic belief. Often the word is used in the sense of atheist. Therefore, it seems that such a person is far removed from Theosophia and from the Masters.

But if you try to look outside your own framework of right and wrong, and see how dedicated and hard Bennett *worked* to ennoble human society, you can understand why the Masters saw in him someone who was fighting for the same altruistic cause as they were. Therefore, he was able to function as an intermediary between the spiritual world of them and the outer world in which Bennett lived and worked.

Bennett advocated true science, free thinking, free exchange of ideas, equality between men and women, free education, the reform of labor. And without hesitation he fought against the churches with their priests and dogmas, false theology, superstition, ignorance, the privileges of the aristocrats and the rich. He was an excellent help to the Masters in ridding Western thought of superstitions of all kinds.

When Bennett set sail for Bombay, the Masters saw with their foresight that he could be of even greater use to them if he learned something of Eastern thought. Therefore, Master Koothoomi had one of his chelas write a letter to A.P. Sinnett, asking him to instruct Bennett on Indian thought.⁽⁶⁾ Sinnett, who was already in contact with K.H., had lived in India for many years and was reasonably familiar with the religion of that country. He was certainly capable of doing so.

How Sinnett discharged the task is not known, but it can be seen from another letter from Masters that he did it reluctantly and unmotivated. Where did this reluctance come from?

Bennett did not conform to the conventions of the society in which Sinnett lived. While the Masters look at the 'inside' of a human being, Sinnett saw only the dirt under Bennett's nails and perhaps smelled his unpleasant body odor.

Master Morya, who replaced his brother Koothoomi, who was in retreat for a long time, as correspondent, commented on this attitude as follows.

You saw only that Bennett had unwashed hands, uncleaned nails and used coarse language and had – to you – a generally unsavory aspect. But if *that* sort of thing is your criterion of moral excellence or potential power, how many adepts or wonder producing *lamas* would pass your muster?⁽⁷⁾

And more:

There's a moral smell as well as a physical one, good friend. See how well K.H. read your character when he would not

send the Lahore youth to talk with you without a change of dress. The sweet pulp of the orange is *inside* the skin — Sahib: try to look inside boxes for jewels and do not trust to those lying in the lid. I say again: the man is an *honest* man and a very earnest one; not exactly an angel – they must be hunted for in fashionable churches, parties at aristocratical mansions, theatres and clubs and such other *sanctums* – but as angels are outside our cosmogony we are glad of the help of even honest and plucky though dirty men.⁽⁸⁾

Living purely or acting selflessly?

The Masters look at how a person *is*, how he acts and not whether his tie is straight and whether there might be dirt under his nails. Even a pure attitude to life does not merit the attention of the Masters.

The latter is very important even for us now. Even in our time there are people who believe they are living a pure life because they are vegan, do not drink alcohol or use drugs, perhaps meditate every day and burn the most expensive incense. All this is obviously very admirable, but what do they mean to their fellow human beings?

Also in the early days of the T.S., there were people who, because they lived this pure life, believed they had a claim to contact with the Masters. In this case, too, it was Master Morya who made it clear that this pure life is no reason for the Masters to pay attention to them. It is known of Master Morya that he did not really like writing. He therefore used Helena Blavatsky as his 'secretary' to give his views on this 'purity'. The letter in question is therefore written in her handwriting, but the contents are the Master's.

Master Morya raises the question of what these people have done to think they are entitled to the Mahātmās' attention. His answer to that question is not ambiguous:

Nothing whatever. They join the Society, and though remaining as stubborn as ever in their old beliefs and superstitions, and having never given up caste or one single of their customs, they, in their selfish exclusiveness, expect to see and converse with us and have our help in all and everything. I will be pleased if Mr. Sinnett says, to every one of those who may address him with similar pretensions the following: "The 'Brothers' desire me to inform one and all of you, *natives*, that unless a man is prepared to become a thorough theosophist i.e. to do as D. Māvalankar (footnote a on page 84) did, — give up entirely caste, his old superstitions and show himself a true reformer (especially in the case of child marriage) he will remain simply a member of the Society with no hope whatever of ever hearing from us.

The Society, acting in this directly in accordance with our orders, *forces no one to become a theosophist of the Ild. Section.* It is left with himself and at his choice. It is useless for a member to argue ‘I am one of a pure life, I am a teetotaler and an abstainer from meat and vice. All my aspirations are for good etc.’ and he, at the same time, building by his acts and deeds an impassable barrier on the road between himself and us. What have we, the disciples of the true *Arhats*, (footnote b) of esoteric Buddhism and of Sang-gyas (footnote c) to do with the *Shastras* (footnote d) and Orthodox Brahmanism? There are 100 of thousands of Fakirs, Sannyasis (footnote e) and Saddhus (footnote f) leading the most pure lives, and yet being as they are, on the path of *error*, never having had an opportunity to meet, see or even hear of us. Their forefathers have driven away the followers of the only true philosophy upon earth away from India and now, it is not for the latter to come to them but to them to come to us if they want us. Which of them is ready to become a Buddhist, a *Nastika* as they call us? None.

And talking about the Englishmen Sinnett and Hume who corresponded with the Masters, he adds:

Mr. Sinnett and Hume are exceptions. Their beliefs are no barrier to us for they have *none*. They may have had influences around them, bad magnetic emanations the result of drink, Society and promiscuous physical associations (resulting even from shaking hands with impure men) but all this is physical and material impediments which with a little effort we could counteract and even clear away without much detriment to ourselves. Not so with the magnetism and invisible results proceeding from erroneous and sincere beliefs. Faith in the Gods and God, and other superstitions attracts millions of foreign influences, living entities and powerful agents around them, with which we would have to use more than ordinary exercise of power to drive them away. We do not choose to do so. We do not find it either necessary or profitable to lose our time waging war to the unprogressed *Planetaries* who delight in personating gods and sometimes well known characters who have lived on earth.⁽⁹⁾

Footnotes:

- a) Dāmodar Māvalankar was a chela who gave up all his rights as a Brahmin so that he could devote himself entirely to theosophical work. In 19th century India, this was an extraordinary personal sacrifice.
- b) Disciples of Gautama Buddha who had made the most progress during his lifetime and immediately thereafter.
- c) Tibetan equivalent of the Sanskrit word ‘Buddha’.
- d) Sacred scriptures of alleged divine authority, such as the Vedas.
- e) Devoted ascetic, who has renounced all worldly concerns and devotes himself to spiritual meditation and the study of sacred scriptures.
- f) Holy person.

Not the Masters to us, but we to the Masters

This letter later became known as the *Prayag* Letter because the people it concerned were or became members of the *Prayag Psychic Theosophical Society*. (Prayag is the old name for Allahabad.)

There are students in Theosophy who doubt the authenticity of this letter, even though it is clearly written in Mrs. Blavatsky’s handwriting. There are even those who have openly questioned whether Blavatsky passed on her Master’s message properly. These people do not understand why Master Morya advises people who seek contact with the Mahātmas to become Theosophists, abandon the trappings and superstitions of Hinduism and embrace the philosophy of Buddhism.

However, if you study this in conjunction with the appreciation that the Masters held for a figure like Bennett, who courageously fought against Western prejudice and superstition and took jail time for it, the Masters’ policy is perfectly clear and, unsurprisingly, extremely consistent. All superstition, priesthood, belief in god and gods as forces beyond man, distracts from the real ‘salvation’ of mankind, for that resides *within* man. And it is completely unimportant whether it is Western or Eastern religions. Belief in god, gods, in angels or saints, whom you beg for favors through prayer or ritual, can only lead to selfishness. This belief the Masters reject. Two thirds of evil, says Master Koothoomi, comes from religion the moment it becomes a power.⁽¹⁰⁾

The Mahātmas do not waste their time with those who refuse to set aside their exclusive beliefs. After all, the Brahmins reserved their teachings only for their caste. Casteless people were not even allowed to enter the temples. And when Morya says that “they should come to us”, to the followers of the Arhats and the Buddha, it does not mean that they should adhere to the *exoteric* religion of Buddhism, but should study and practice Esoteric Buddhism, and that is actually the same as Universal Theosophia.

Nāstika

Those who could not agree with the contents of this letter

wondered in despair whether they should then become *nāstikas*. To the religious Hindu, a *nāstika* is an atheist, someone who does not believe in god or gods. Some years after this letter, however, with the publication of *The Secret Doctrine*, it turned out that this term in Theosophia means something quite different, namely, ‘the rejection of *idols*, including all anthropomorphic gods’. In this sense, every occultist is a *nāstika*.⁽¹¹⁾

The whole case is reminiscent of the condemnation of Socrates, who was accused of not believing in the gods. However, in his famous *Apology*, he vigorously denied this. He did believe in the gods, but not in the way it was done in Greece of his day. He did not believe in the anthropomorphic gods, not in *idols*, who, if you do not satisfy them with prayer, ritual and sacrifice, take revenge on you.

Not without reason does Master Morya speak of the Buddha. Never did the Buddha question the underlying philosophy of the Vedas, or deny the existence of gods. However, he purified it and stripped it of all trappings and prejudices that had swirled down upon it over the centuries. The Brahmin priestly caste, however, has again expelled the teachings purified by the Buddha, and has reverted to the many prejudices and unjust traditions – such as child marriages – and to the senseless ritual intended to satisfy the so-called gods. This is what Master Morya points out.

Moreover, this belief is not without danger. It arouses forces, which are in no way beneficial. Partly for this reason, he refers to the simplicity of the original Buddhism, which constantly points to the powers within man. After all, the Buddha proclaimed that man must accomplish his own salvation.

The social fertility of Theosophia

The true Theosophist, of whom the Master speaks, is the one who is unselfish, detached from the dogmas of any church or science, and who independently studies the Divine Truth, and furthermore – and most importantly – applies the ethical consequences of that study in his own life. He is a human being who constantly works to show his brothers, wandering in the darkness of outer life, the way to the light.

It is wonderful if you can quote passages from *The Secret Doctrine* and know what certain Sanskrit terms mean. But that knowledge is useless if you do not use it to alleviate the misery and suffering in the world with it. No Theosophist doubts the usefulness of a pure and clean life, but that life is meaningful only when it is used for the

benefit of others.

Theosophia is not a highway to Nirvāna, but the actual Universal Brotherhood of all that lives. This realization compels us to roll up our sleeves and work, constantly work, to give Theosophia its rightful place in the world.

The desire for one’s own bliss will not bear fruit in society, while Theosophia proves its worth only when it is socially fruitful. It is time, said the Mahā Chohan, the Master of Masters, for Theosophy to enter the arena.⁽¹²⁾

Only when the theosophical teachings penetrate human thought and thereby exert their influence on all levels of human society has the T.S. fulfilled its function. Whoever contributes to it is a helper of the Masters and in turn receives help from the Masters.

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11. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine. Volume I*. Various editions, p. 279 (original English edition).
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Key thoughts

- » Human evolution is the progressive, self-guided unfolding of (in essence boundless!) consciousness: an infinite, cyclical process that proceeds through cooperation of consciousnesses of different quality.
- » Our future human evolution is in the development of increasingly universal thinking, of compassion for all that lives, of forgiveness and wisdom.
- » Ideally, technology always serves the benefit of a living being and ultimately the evolution of the whole.
- » The average human mindset reflects itself in the development and use of technology.
- » Technology is not neutral: it is not independent of the mindset of its creators, and its use is not independent of the mindset of its users.
- » No technology will change anything about our evolutionary process: consciousness develops always from within outwards. Technology can, however, stimulate or hinder this process.
- » To prevent technology from hindering our human evolution, it is important to consider the motive in its development, deployment and assessment.

The future of humanity and technology

You can just watch the average science fiction movie to find out that expectations about the role of technology in the future are great. Spaceships, smart robots and communication or even materialization from a distance. But one might wonder whether technological progress also means progress to our human evolution. What does the universal wisdom say about the future of humanity and the role of technology? What does that future look like and what does it mean for the development of our technology now?

If you look at pictures from the many old science fiction comics, or watch older science fiction movies, you can see how technology has inevitably played an important role in our imagined future, and many of the expectations about technology in the future have come true. There are now smart robots, there is remote communication with images on a small screen and we are already making the first space voyages. Now, remote materialization – think ‘Beam me up, Scotty’, the command with

which the captain of the *Starship Enterprise* in the series *Star Trek* is transported to and from his ship – is still far off in the future for us. However, with a 3D-printer, you can instantly print out an object based on a digital file that can be downloaded in an instant, wherever and whenever you want. But what picture does science fiction portray of humanity in the future?

Science fiction does not portray a future mentality

Actually, our image of humans in the future has hardly changed in the last 75 years of science fiction. We see future humans eagerly using all kinds of technical gadgets, but human beings themselves remain almost the same compared to us current human beings. In terms of mentality, the future man is indistinguishable from the average man of today. Take, for instance, the way the ‘future man’ in the film *Avatar* deals with another civilization. This is very similar to how Western man behaved in the



colonial era: greedy, out for his own gain and uninhibited in the use of violence against nature and indigenous people. So, if we derive anything of a future mentality from science fiction at all, then it is rather that of aliens, and humans themselves usually do not play such a pretty role.

In fact, this represents a lack of imagination about the future of our own mentality! Theosophy does provide this insight, as we will explain in this article. We will broadly outline the future evolution of humanity according to universal wisdom.

Then we return to the subject of technology. From the picture of humanity's future, we can better place the role of technology and explain how we can safely manage technological development.

Evolution and the future according to universal wisdom

To begin with, it is good to give an idea of how Theosophy looks at the future. Because when you look at science fiction, that future is usually not that far away. Much science fiction from the past century places the future in the year 2000, for example. More recent science fiction outlines a future just a few decades ahead; the 1980s movie *Blade Runner* about Los Angeles, for example, is set in 2019 and its sequel in the year 2049. Sometimes science fiction even takes place in the past, as in, say, *Star Wars: A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away ...*

To understand what universal wisdom says about the future, knowledge of the three basic principles or propositions of the Secret Doctrine or Theosophy is indispensable. The first proposition immediately puts into perspective what we understand by future:

1. 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. (...) one absolute Reality which antecedes all manifested, conditioned, being.⁽¹⁾

It follows that every being springs from, or rather *is*, in essence, this PRINCIPLE. In essence, then, all life is eternal and immortal. We have always been there and will always be there in the future. We are then referring to our essence: a 'spark of eternity', a center of essentially boundless consciousness. Our body, our personality, everything in us that still identifies with temporality, that thinks in terms of days, years, centuries, a beginning or end and past

and future, is not that. Our body and personality are merely the vehicles in which our imperishable part dresses itself, during the infinite cycles we go through.

The second proposition of Theosophy describes that everything, as a 'spark of eternity', manifests cyclically:

2. The Eternity of the Universe *in toto* as a boundless plane; periodically "the playground of numberless Universes incessantly manifesting and disappearing," called "the manifesting stars," and the "sparks of Eternity."⁽²⁾

So every being, everything that manifests itself, from atom to star, is essentially such a cyclical expression of a spark of eternity.

Finally, the third proposition describes that during these cycles, each spark of eternity evolves from within or grows:

3. The fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul, the latter being itself an aspect of the Unknown Root; and the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul – a spark of the former – through the Cycle of Incarnation (or "Necessity") in accordance with Cyclic and Karmic law, during the whole term.⁽³⁾

Growth always occurs in cooperation with other beings: we evolve within the sphere of a more highly developed consciousness (a Solar Being as an 'Over-Soul', for example) and, in turn, make use of countless other beings for our physical vehicle, think of the cells and atoms of our body, which in turn evolve within our sphere. This evolution follows similar patterns: as above, so below. However, each being does evolve in its own unique way.

Of course, this is far from a complete exposition, but it gives an idea. For more on the basic thoughts of the universal wisdom or Theosophia, please refer to *Lucifer's* symposium issue on 'The Secret Doctrine – The Theory of Everything'.⁽⁴⁾ On the basis of these three propositions, you can conclude the following about evolution:

- Evolution is the progressive development or unfolding of (in essence boundless!) *consciousness*.
- Evolution is an infinite, cyclical process, because life is essentially boundless and manifests cyclically.
- Evolution occurs through cooperation of consciousnesses of different quality.

The future evolution of humanity

Having given an outline of what is understood by universal wisdom or Theosophia as evolution and having put the

idea of 'future' into perspective, we can now zoom in a little on the future evolution of humanity in particular. Again, we permit ourselves only an outline and refer for more information to the theosophical literature, such as *Fundamentals of Esoteric Philosophy* and *Man in Evolution*, both by Gottfried de Purucker.⁽⁵⁾

If we are essentially 'sparks of eternity', then humanity is just a stage, a phase in our evolution, where we learn to unfold something of our inner faculties. In the human stage, we develop our thinking faculty: we grow from unself-conscious to Self-conscious. And by Self, with a capital letter, we mean our deepest essence, the spark of eternity within us. The more we, through our thinking, identify with it, the further we evolve as human beings. It is a phase of evolution that we can basically complete within the lifespan of our planet, according to Theosophy a period of 4 billion and 320 million years. This period can again be divided into seven major cycles or schools of life, also called Rounds in Theosophical literature, each of which thus spans many hundreds of million years.

Each of those Rounds is characterized by the development of one of the seven aspects of thinking, from the first to the seventh:

1. Physical
2. Feeling
3. Vitality
4. Desire
5. Intellect
6. Insight, understanding, intuition
7. Inspiration or sense of unity

You can divide those Rounds again into seven grades each, like a school has grades. These also last millions of years, and in those, we go through many incarnations.

In this total evolutionary cycle of 4 billion and 320 million years, we as humanity are about halfway through. The average human being is in the fourth school of life or Round, and thereby in the fifth grade. In each grade, we express one of the seven aspects, but as a sub-aspect of the characteristic aspect of the Round. The current fifth grade thus represents the intellectual phase of the fourth school in which we learn to master the desire aspect of our thinking, something we can easily recognize in the everyday world around us. A lot of value is placed on intellectual development in our education system, for example, we classify people according to their cognitive abilities and then talk about 'lower' and 'higher' education. Once out of school or graduated from university, those intellectual capacities are mainly used to pursue certain desires. And

those desires consist of a mixture of more material/selfish desires and immaterial or unselfish desires.

As an example of the former, we see that many people spend much of their lives making money for a company, making money for themselves, for their *own* wealth and luxury. At the same time, they also pursue immaterial things, they provide a service to society with their organization, they add some value, and they also work for the well-being of those around them. At the global level, too, we see a competition of national economies where intellectual capital is deployed to increase the *nation's* material prosperity and, at the same time, we recognize an international pursuit of universal ideals: equal rights for all, freedom of press and speech, combating poverty, et cetera, even if, unfortunately, these are increasingly under pressure.

This dual motive is characteristic of the current phase of our evolution in the fourth school of life: the school of desire thinking which is exactly at the halfway point of our total development. In it, we are going through a turning point from material to spiritual orientation. This is sometimes portrayed as a struggle, an inner struggle that we can recognize in ourselves. We are still often seduced by external things, and the pursuit of material prosperity for ourselves alone, while inwardly we do realize, and also experience more and more, that if we act unselfishly, we become more harmonious in our lives.

Our future lies in the expansion of the spiritual side of our consciousness, of our thinking capacity. An expansion from limited to increasingly universal thinking, from an identification with only our outer existence to an identification with life as a whole, with all living beings. This may sound nice, but where does this knowledge come from?

Forerunners in human evolution

From the moment we have learned to think self-consciously, we can increasingly self-direct this evolution, self-guide it. This also means that acceleration can take place. As with any large group going through a particular process – like students going through a school or cyclists riding a cycling tour – there is a peloton consisting of the largest group, and in smaller groups there are both forerunners and laggards. It is the forerunners in human evolution who have given us the knowledge mentioned above. We then speak of the great Teachers of humanity, such as Gautama the Buddha, Śāṅkarācārya, Plato or Confucius. These are people who are ahead of the average human being by one or even more than one of the great stages of

evolution, i.e. one or even two full Rounds. In the table below, we describe some of these groups and their characteristics.

The average person as a Fourth Rounder is generally still very much attached to the illusion of this one outer life. Most people still have little awareness of their imperishable spiritual core. Even assuming reincarnation, they do not see themselves as a learning soul, evolving life after life. They are spiritually dormant and act only sporadically with inspiration. Occasionally, they follow the inspires of their conscience, the more enduring part of our soul, which contains the wisdom we collected in past lives.

The seekers of truth are a little further ahead of this average group. These people have already developed something of a spiritual sense within themselves.

A little further advanced in their evolution are the true idealists, great people who advance human culture in social, scientific, philosophical, religious or artistic spheres. Often these people are already a full Round ahead of the average person in development and are therefore called Fifth Rounders. Our literature describes people like Plato and Confucius as examples of this. (Lay-)Disciples of the Masters of Wisdom and Compassion also belong to this class (called *chelas*).

Masters are even more advanced Fifth Rounders. They work selflessly and relentlessly for humanity. They are spiritually awakened and thus can draw directly from the wisdom that lives in more inner realms.

Finally, to date, humanity has produced only one complete Sixth Rounder: Gautama the Buddha. For more in-

formation on the esoteric Gautama the Buddha, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Masters and their chelas, please refer to *Esoteric Teachings* volume X by Gottfried de Purucker, and the article on it in *Lucifer*.⁽⁶⁾

These groups are not strictly separated from each other and the variation in mentality or development of thought is as diverse as there are people. We can, however, get an idea of the future of our human evolution and the qualities that go with it from this outline. One of our theosophical teachers adds the following in response to a question about Fifth Rounders:

How to become a Fifth Rounder? By following the Law, cultivating the six glorious virtues, cultivating your intellect, cultivating your heart. Become impersonal. Learn to forgive. Learn to love. These are manly virtues.⁽⁷⁾

By the Law here is meant Dharma or Duty, the most universal habit pattern in Nature, the principle that everything supports everything else, and every being acts from the awareness of oneness with all other beings. By the six glorious virtues is meant the six or seven mental attitudes, as we also referred to in our symposium issue 'Help build the mentality of the future – seven Sources of Wisdom and seven character transformations':⁽⁸⁾

1. Love immortal
2. Harmony in word and act
3. Patience that naught can ruffle
4. Indifference to pleasure and pain
5. Dauntless energy

Degrees of human evolution

Mānushya (human) Buddhas, 6 th Rounders	Semi-divine human beings (extremely rare)	Spiritually enlightened
Mahatmas, human Bodhisattvas, advanced 5 th Rounders	Unselfish, strong sense of Oneness, compassionate	Spiritually awakened
True humanitarians, idealists, (lay-)chelas, 5 th Rounders	Unselfish, great intuition, understanding, compassion	Spiritually half awakened
Above average human beings, advanced 4 th Rounders	Intuitive sense of Oneness Seekers for Truth	Spiritually awakening
Average human beings, 4 th Rounders	Attached to the illusion of outer life	Spiritually dormant

6. Ceaseless spiritual meditation
7. Intuitive wisdom

With this brief outline of the future of human evolution, we can now look at technology, its role in future human evolution and how we can start directing it *now*. We start with a description of technology.

What is technology?

The word ‘technology’ comes from the Greek τέχνη (*téchne*) meaning ‘ability’ or ‘skill’ and the suffix *-logy* meaning ‘study of’.

Technology is the doctrine of technics. In our everyday language, we use technics and technology interchangeably and technology usually refers to technics as well. We use that broader meaning in the remainder of this article as well.

The derivation of the word does not yet clearly express what technology is meant for. Fortunately, for that we can turn to a Theosophist from an earlier era: the wise Plato.

In his dialogue *Philebus*, Plato takes shipbuilding as an example and socratically asks the question, “Does shipbuilding exist because of ships? Or do ships exist because of shipbuilding?”

And of course, the implication here is that technology is always at the service of something else. He continues:

I hold that all ingredients, as well as all tools, and quite generally all materials, are always provided for the sake of some process of generation. I further hold that every process of generation in turn always takes place for the sake of some particular being, and that all generation taken together takes place for the sake of being as a whole.⁽⁹⁾

Thus, shipbuilding consists of means and tools and techniques to produce or make ships. We make ships to transport people or goods such as food. Means that help people exist, that help people in their ‘generation’. And we transport those goods and people for the sake of human existence as a whole: communication between people, trade between people, all for the sake of the development or generation of people, the evolution of humanity as a whole, we might indeed conclude with Plato.

In short, technology ideally always serves to generate something, for the benefit of a living being, and ultimately for the evolution of the whole.

Characteristic of this description is the desire characteristic. It is always about something existing *for the benefit of* or *for the sake of* something else. Technology is always a means to some end. It is not an end in itself, but we want

to use it to achieve something, to satisfy a particular desire or longing. And that end can be something very banal or, on the contrary, something very noble. Here we see the duality of a desire again. A hammer can be used for both *sculpting* and *demolition*, for both *making* and *breaking* of either a statue of a *dictator* or an *inspiring human leader*.

What is the role of technology in our evolution?

Humans have always used technology. From simple tools like stone axes to very sophisticated machines. Both the type and the use of technology reflect the average human mentality. For thousands of years, the Chinese used gunpowder for ornamental fireworks. However, warlike Western man in the late Middle Ages quickly deployed this invention to develop cannons and later guns and pistols. The development of technology grows along with the rise and fall of civilizations. Every growth cycle, whether large or small, goes through seven phases. Those growth phases can be interpreted through the different elements, which are analogous to the seven principles and thought aspects: earth, water, air, fire, ether and two more elements above that.⁽¹⁰⁾ If we look at a growth cycle in the western part of the world from the Middle Ages onwards, in terms of technology, the element earth was first central. Development was particularly in agriculture and land transport. Around the 16th and 17th centuries, the element water became more active and a time of seafarers and colonists followed. In the late 19th century, the element air became more prominent in, for example, the development of steam engines and of airplanes. This was followed by a period when the element fire became more prominent in, for example, jet engines and in electricity. And then followed an era of the element ether with all the electronics, radio, television, and satellite communications, which brought about even more subtle forms of technology, such as internet technology.

We have shaped technology and technology provides opportunities to further shape ourselves. Agriculture ensures that we no longer have to migrate for our food and can stay in one place. Seafaring has enabled global trade, as well as faster cultural exchange. Machines have enabled mass production and freed us from a lot of time-consuming manual labor. Among other things, electricity has given us the ability to be active at night and in dark winter months, and the internet provides instant information exchange at any time with any connected place on earth and even in space.

These technological developments have followed each other in rapid succession over the past century and a half, so it is not surprising that people wonder about ‘what will be next’ in the future.

Undeniably, technology has brought us much. For example, thanks to science and technology, we have gained a much better understanding of our place in evolution and in the universe. We have been able to raise the standard of living of a great number of people. The exchange of knowledge and mutual contact worldwide has grown enormously. Technology has literally brought humanity closer together. At the same time, we also see many downsides. Technological progress has also accelerated the depletion of nature, triggered a global arms race, and fueled a growth in material desire. A new technology like artificial intelligence (AI) comes with its own challenges such as the disappearance of the dividing line between reality and illusion (see the article ‘How intelligent is ChatGPT?’ in *Lucifer*).⁽¹¹⁾ Besides, the question is whether the mentality of humanity as a whole has really advanced with all the technical innovations. The inequality between rich and poor is still here and even increasing. The world has not become more peaceful. Technology may even hinder our evolution.

Technology is not neutral

People often see technology as something neutral, impersonal, just a tool. Only how we use technology – selfish or unselfish – would then be decisive. However, besides its *use*, the *development* of technology is not neutral either. Our human motives are always connected to it. We give two examples below of how the development of two products of a simple piece of technology, an overpass and a building, can hinder or instead encourage people’s development.

First, the ‘bad’ example. It is a classic example from the philosophy of technology. It is cited in an article called: ‘Do Artifacts Have Politics?’⁽¹²⁾ In other words, can things, or technology, convey certain political ideas or values? And the affirmative answer to that is illustrated by a ‘racist’ overpass in New York state, see the picture below. Now, of

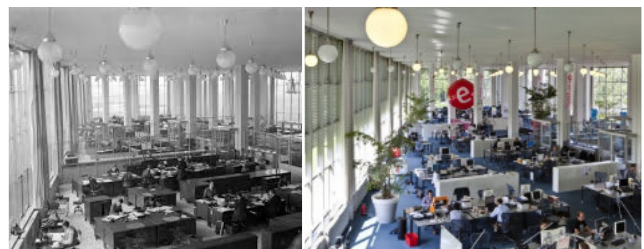


course, the overpass itself is not racist, but, reportedly, the person who built it is. One suspects that the designer of this bridge or viaduct deliberately made it very low. In fact, the designer held racist ideas. And at the time this overpass was built, it spanned the road to the coast. There was a beach located there, which was used most often by the surrounding ‘white’ neighborhoods. The ‘blacks’ from other neighborhoods usually depended on the public transport to get to this beach. The city bus could not pass under the low overpass and had to make quite a detour, which meant that the beach was suddenly out of reach for blacks and remained reserved for whites.

Whether the designer really had this motive, we will never know for sure, but the story nevertheless illustrates how even an overpass can foster inequality.

Fortunately, the opposite is also abundant. We give a well-known Dutch building as an example: the Van Nelle factory in Rotterdam, built between 1927 and 1930. This was one of the most modern factory buildings at the time and is registered on Unesco’s World Heritage List. The complex was commissioned by Cees van der Leeuw, not coincidentally a Theosophist. His ideal was to create a workplace where employees could enjoy working safely and hygienically, in a space well-lit with daylight.

Although it has lost its original function as a coffee factory, it is still one of the most attractive places to work. It now houses all kinds of companies, mainly from the ICT sector. I myself enjoyed working there for several years, especially the spaciousness and light are fantastic.



So technology can hold certain values and, in a sense, both encourage and hinder our evolution, and this is not confined to the values designers incorporate in it. As H.P. Blavatsky writes in one of her articles, “(...) an excess of the technical and special knowledge of the day very often acts to prevent men from apprehending the truth.”⁽¹³⁾

The direction of evolution, as we have described, is moving towards the universal rather than the specialized. For example, you can see that cultures that are open and dynamic are flourishing, and that the highly self-centered closed societies are slowly dying out. And the company

Kodak, for example, once the specialist in analogue photography, could not make the shift to the more universal digital technology and went bankrupt in 2012.

In these times when we are struggling to break free from our digital world, can barely get through life without a smartphone and addiction to all kinds of apps is commonplace, Blavatsky's statement is almost prophetic. The specialist knowledge with which apps, games and videos are created to absorb our attention and present us with all kinds of illusions distracts many people from searching for truth. They immerse themselves in a 'bubble', as it were. We are therefore skeptical of 'tech-optimists' or 'solutionists' who preach that blockchain or AI or quantum computing or ... (and fill in the next technological hype here) will solve the world's problems. Rather, the question is: how do we now direct the development of technology in such a way that it supports rather than hinders our human evolution?

Future-proof technology in light of human evolution

To prevent technology from threatening our well-being and hampering our human evolution, it is important to identify the motive behind it. Technology always serves to produce something, serves a particular desire, and the question is what exactly is being desired and to whom does it apply? Does it revolve around a material or spiritually oriented desire and does it benefit just one or a few individuals or humanity as a whole? That question is not yet so easy to answer, as motives play a role in both the development, the use, and also the assessment of technology. Of the various motives in its development and use, we have given examples above, but often the development of technology is also fueled by our assessment of it. For example, emotions such as fear of a technology, or on the other hand excessive enthusiasm, do not directly contribute to putting the role of technology in our lives into perspective. Developers of AI, for example, use both fear mongering and exaggerated optimism to generate attention for their services or attract funders.

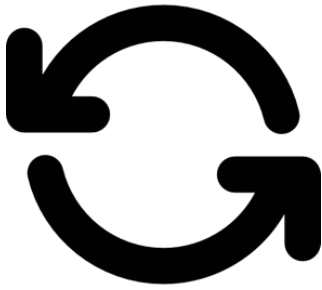
Rather, the assessment of technology benefits from a sober, unbiased analysis that de-mythologizes technology, and assesses in advance its consequences, for all those affected by it. For instance, by asking in a more theosophical-philosophical way what a technology really means, how it works and what it does. In other words, what values does it promote or constrain? With this in mind, we published our article on ChatGPT in *Lucifer*, for example.⁽¹⁴⁾

Put the mentality of the future first

Finally, if we return to the theosophical view of evolution, we cannot help but downplay the influence of technology. Human evolution is about the development of ever more universal thinking faculties, the development of an unselfish mentality, compassion for all that lives, understanding, forgiveness and wisdom. And no technology or external means will change or be able to change anything essential to this evolutionary process from within. If we live from the most universal *mentality*, we will always develop, use and assess technology in the right way.

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An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth

Revenge is a very strange idea. It lacks any kind of wisdom: will my suffering be compensated by causing suffering to another person?

How old is the motto ‘an eye for an eye’?

Our society is going through many changes. Techniques and ideas are being applied that are totally different from those of 100 to 200 years ago. Nevertheless, we have mental habits of thinking that are thousands of years old. This applies, for example, to the motto ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’. We encounter this way of thinking and acting everywhere, even in non-Western cultures, but it is especially dominant in the West, underlying thinking that then emerges in many forms. Why has this way of responding to injustice persisted for so long?

If we look at ancient law books that represent this thought, we will find the Mosaic laws, and even older documents. The oldest known so far is the codex of Hammurabi, king of Babylonia (1792-1750 BC). The later Mosaic laws *Leviticus* 24:19-21 and *Deuteronomy* 19:16-21 are derived from it. So, this way of thinking is at least 4,000 years old.

This in itself is remarkable because many ways of thinking are abandoned in a shorter time. Is this thought still alive because texts such as the laws of Moses are still being

used, or because ‘an eye for an eye’ actually represents our mindset today, and is therefore still so prevalent? A thought can only live on for so many generations if it finds a good breeding ground in us humans and is continuously nourished and passed on. Many people cannot let go of this thought, despite how primitive it really is, in order to arrive at a different vision, yet they do demonstrate great flexibility in many other areas.

What do we seek to achieve with punishment?

In the old law books mentioned above, the basic principle is that if someone has been wronged, there should be an equal retaliation for the victim. And this is where the discussion starts: what is appropriate retaliation? What do we actually wish to achieve with punishment? Let us look at what most modern law books aim at. This will vary from culture to culture and from country to country, but a general line can be discerned. Usually four goals are mentioned:

1. retaliation;
2. prevention;
3. deterrence;
4. helping and educating (bringing the offender back into society).

Key thoughts

» Retaliating evil with evil has been done for a very long time. But is that logical and wise?

» In the light of karma, cause and effect, we will leave any kind of ‘retribution’ to this unfailingly just Law.

» From the standpoint of Universal Wisdom, we will always respond with compassion to harm done, and focus on (a) preventing crimes and (b) reforming the thinking of the perpetrators.

You will notice at a glance that these are four very subjective terms, which can be debated endlessly. Consequently, we find additional guidelines in all cultures, worked out over many hundreds or even thousands of years.

Finding a good balance between these four points presents a great challenge. There is a wide range of possibilities. The most humane approach is that a person who has committed a crime, having served his punishment – assuming that the punishment has not made it impossible for him to do so – can resume his place in harmonious society as a good fellow citizen, and they have learned from their misconduct. That he has come to the understanding that everyone should behave compassionately and humanely.

Retaliation

The element of retribution or retaliation certainly provokes the most discussion. What is appropriate retaliation? It makes sense that this is where a culture's ethical views become important. What exactly does retaliation mean? In what areas do we retaliate: physical, mental, spiritual? You can understand that this could lead to a long course of discussion. Suppose retaliation is not proportionate, an over-reaction, then the victim of retaliation would in turn be entitled to retaliate. As you can see, this is going to work like a pendulum swinging back and forth, where it can take a very long time for balance to be restored.

The points 1 and 3, retaliation and deterrence, invoke the

greatest ethical discussions. Everyone has an opinion about them. In the practice of criminal justice, points 2 (prevention) and 4 (helping and educating) have proven to be the most effective in restoring and maintaining harmony and balance in the life of the punished.

These goals can be used to some extent. We see this with criminal justice at the local level, but at the global level, the situation can get completely out of hand, despite the many international treaties. Large groups of people feed on thoughts of hatred, and therefore cannot break the spiral of cause and effect. While the solutions to this have been put forward for thousands of years, based on knowledge of the universal laws, and in particular of *karma*, the law of cause and effect, the law of restoring balance.

Karma

Karma works everywhere. It is therefore a universal law.⁽¹⁾ Karma means that every act will produce a consequence corresponding in character. So, every situation we experience has a cause: it is a consequence of a previous action we have performed.

If we start from karma, punishment appears in a completely different light. Then retaliation is also an action that evokes a consequence *corresponding* in character. Is that not an attempt to 'compensate crime with crime'?

Seen in this light, is the prevention of crime (goal 2) and sustained training and education (goal 4) not a much



better approach? Because then one breaks a negative spiral of cause and effect, of crime upon crime. Beyond the fact: who is standing so above the Universal Laws that he is allowed to compensate a crime with a crime? Especially when it comes to cruel, inhuman punishments like the death penalty, which is still carried out in some countries. Clearly, our vengeance keeps us in a perpetual spiral of ‘an eye for an eye,’ of violence. If, on the other hand, we leave compensating to the great Law of cause and effect (karma), we need not retaliate, for this is what the great Law does. Then re-educating, restoring harmony, has become our first compassionate task, and the only right approach.

The New Testament

We also find this universal insight in a source well known to Western Christian man: the New Testament, *Matthew* 5:38-39. There a totally different point of view on ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’ is given — which, unfortunately, never became that popular:

38. Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

39. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.⁽²⁾

If we read the New Testament in the light of karma, ‘the great Law,’ and especially Matthew 5, it is much easier to understand. We must remember that the gospel of Matthew was probably written in Aramaic, and thus went through many stages of translation.⁽³⁾ Anyone who has translated anything knows that 100% correct translations are almost impossible. Translations are limited by the translator’s knowledge of the two languages and their corresponding worlds of thought, and also by the translator’s own world of thought. The translator must bridge the gap between two different worlds of thought, of which the languages are an expression. It often happens that for a concept in one language, no corresponding words can be found in the other language.

Divine laws

Regarding divine laws, Jesus the Nazarene, according to the *Gospel of Matthew* (5:19-20), says:

19. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called

the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

20. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

If in the above text we replace the term ‘commandments’ with ‘divine laws,’ the text will already be much closer to the ideas of Theosophia. In Theosophia we speak of divine laws: the habitual patterns of the higher beings in Nature. We speak of the seven Jewels of Wisdom as the seven universal laws in Nature.

We, as a society, do need to have built confidence in these laws. We do that by examining them for ourselves, individually: whether we can experience them as being accurate within our own sphere of consciousness, within our field of existence. If so, they are proven for us.

With the understanding of the justness of karma thus accumulated, we need not retaliate or deter through punishment. We can leave this to the great Law. Then it is our duty to help offenders get back on track. This approach will bear much better fruit in subsequent incarnations, evoking not a negative but a positive spiral.

Then we also start to see ‘crime’ in a much broader sense. Not just as breaking the letter of the law: the spirit of the law must also be respected. This does require thinking on a different and much higher ethical level than everyday events often show us.

Buddhism, as an expression of Universal Wisdom

We end with a quote from G. de Purucker, which shows how the doctrine of karma has an inspiring effect on human thought:

Could you give a little explanation of the difference between Theosophy and Buddhism as it is generally taught today amongst the masses?

That is a good question, and one I like, because if I were not a Theosophist, I most emphatically would have accepted the doctrines of the Lord Gautama, the Buddha, as the most humane, the most philosophic, the most generous, the most princely, not only in their attitude towards men, but in the effect they produce upon men.

The difference is that between the mother and a very lovely daughter. The sublime mother is Theosophy, the lovely daughter is Buddhism. I would say that even as

Buddhism is practiced today, some 2500 years after the passing of its great Founder, even today it is the most theosophical of all the religions existent, the most generous, the most tender in its understanding of human problems; and in its dealing with them, without a vestige of anything that is harsh, unkind, or colored by hatred in any form. It has no doctrine of arbitrary punishment. Its doctrine of retribution based on cosmic law or karman, is retribution infinitely just. The evil that ye do will live after you, and ye yourselves the doers of it will meet it one day, and until ye undo the evil that ye have wrought it will abide — wonderfully logical, satisfying, and comforting.

Just see how this takes hold of the human heart. The true Buddhist says of his injurer: “He has injured me terribly. I pity him. I desire no revenge. That would be but adding my might to the evil that is wrought, for some day the evil that he wrought upon me will fall, helpless man, upon him, and in addition he will have the evil that that evil-doing wrought in his own character. A double evil. I, his victim in this life, will receive recompense, double the recompense of the wrong, the injury, done unto me, because I shall have retributive compensation for the wrong, and because I do not in my turn hit back at my injurer, I have the increments of strength of character thus growing out of the injury wrought upon me, which is a double good to myself, who have suffered. I have the recompense in my own soul, that I know how to be patient and strike not, hit not back.”

Divinity breathes through that. It is the very heart of pity, of compassion. And that is pure Theosophy. In other words, Buddhism is but a lovely daughter of a still more lovely mother. Christianity is its daughter, Brahmanism is its daughter, Taoism, all the religions of India, Persia, China, Egypt, of ancient Europe, and of the Americas. They all sprang from this one source, our God-Wisdom, as we call it, kept in the Guardianship of the Mahātmās, greatly evolved men. But I think that Buddhism is the loveliest of the daughters, because the truest. Fidelity has crowned her. Justice has followed her footsteps.⁽⁴⁾

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Thomas Taylor, painted by Thomas Lawrence.

Theosophical Platonists

A visit to the Prometheus Trust in London

Our visit to the Prometheus Trust group in London gives us an ideal opportunity to tell more about their goals and activities, and about the ancient Platonic tradition in general.

Key thoughts

» In connection with an interesting visit to one of *The Prometheus Trust's* study meetings, we pay attention to: who was Thomas Taylor, what was his life work, and what does *The Prometheus Trust* try to accomplish? And finally, what are the *origins* of the Platonic tradition?

Last holiday period, I paid a visit to London. A city with a lot of theosophical history and places of interest. This is where H.P. Blavatsky first met her Master, completed *The Secret Doctrine* and where her physical vehicle finally found its end for this incarnation. You can also request and view the original *Masters' Letters* at the *British Library*.

Besides theosophical lodges of both the Theosophical Society (TS Adyar) and the ULT (United Lodge of Theosophists), many other spiritual organizations are active here. One of these is the Prometheus Trust, a publisher of the works and translations of Thomas Taylor, an early nineteenth-century Platonist. Thomas Taylor played an important role in making Ancient Greek philosophy accessible in English, about which more below. Once a month, the Prometheus Trust in London organizes an open study evening, and it so happened that I was able to attend. It was surprising how, as a theosophist, you can seamlessly join such a platonic study. First something about Thomas Taylor.

Thomas Taylor, the Platonist

Englishman Thomas Taylor (1758-1835), also known as 'The Platonist', translated all of Plato's dialogues, the works of many Neoplatonists and also rare Ancient Greek writings for the first time into English. His work influenced well-known writers such as Blake, Shelley and Wordsworth, as well as American thinkers such as philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson – the father of transcendentalism who is known for the essay *The Over-soul* – and early Theosophists such as G.S.R. Mead – Blavatsky's secretary for many years – and Dr Alexander Wilder, a Platonist who helped Blavatsky write *Isis Unveiled*. Blavatsky and Wilder describe Thomas Taylor in the latter work as follows:

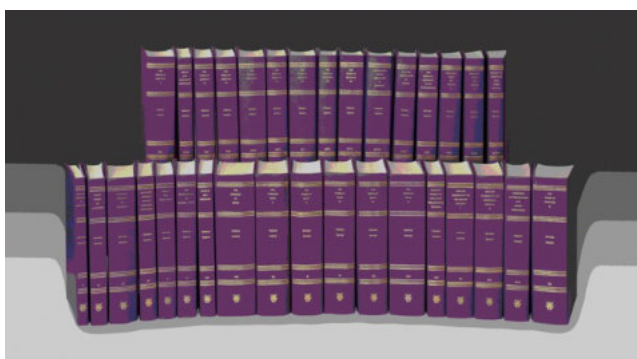
(...) we will recur to the untiring labors of that honest and brave defender of the ancient faith, Thomas Taylor, and his works. However much dogmatic Greek scholarship may have found to say against his "mistranslations," his memory must be dear to

every true Platonist, who seeks rather to learn the inner thought of the great philosopher than enjoy the mere external mechanism of his writings. Better classical translators may have rendered us, in more correct phraseology, Plato's *words*, but Taylor shows us Plato's *meaning*, and this is more than can be said of Zeller, Jowett, and their predecessors. Yet, as writes Professor A. Wilder, "Taylor's works have met with favor at the hands of men capable of profound and recondite thinking; and it must be conceded that he was endowed with a superior qualification — that of an intuitive perception of the interior meaning of the subjects which he considered. Others may have known more Greek, but he knew more Plato."⁽¹⁾

In *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky describes Taylor as 'the most intuitional of all the translators of Greek Fragments'.⁽²⁾ It is therefore very helpful for Theosophists to take note of Taylor's works.

Prometheus Trust

The Prometheus Trust publishes Thomas Taylor's impressive volume of translations in its completeness in a beautifully bound and affordable edition. Plato's dialogues together make up only five of the total thirty-three volumes, and those five also contain valuable commentaries by Thomas Taylor himself on quite a few dialogues. The other volumes are devoted to works by Neoplatonists such as Plotinus, Porphyrius, Iamblichus, Proclus, surviving fragments from the Ancient Greek Orphic and Pythagorean traditions and the complete works of Aristotle.



The complete series of translations and commentaries of Thomas Taylor.⁽³⁾

In addition to publishing the works of Thomas Taylor, the Prometheus Trust offers studies in this Platonic tradition. They see the study of Plato and the Platonic tradition as a path to greater wisdom, in line with what Plato himself writes about it:

It is requisite to show that philosophy is a thing of the greatest consequence, and that it is only to be obtained by great study and mighty labour. For he who hears that this is the case, if he is truly a lover of wisdom, and is adapted to and worthy of its acquisition, being a divine person, will think that he hears of an admirable way, that he ought immediately to betake himself to this path, and make it the great business of his life.⁽⁴⁾

Study in a theosophical atmosphere

The study took place in a rented room at a cultural center near Regent's Park. The study was public; there were no conditions of participation; a donation was appreciated. I was one of seven participants. The study was led by Tim Addey, one of the founders of the Prometheus Trust, assisted by one of his daughters.

The focus was on how to better understand Platonic texts with the help of the triad, a trinity or threefold division. Triads are not only frequent in Plato's dialogues, think of the Beautiful, the True and the Good, for example,⁽⁵⁾ the three classes of the state — the governors, the auxiliaries and the producers — or the man who, as a charioteer, has to restrain two horses of opposite character.⁽⁶⁾ Triads also recur extensively among the Neoplatonists.

As an introduction, a text had been made available containing excerpts from the works of Plato and various Neoplatonists translated by Thomas Taylor with a brief commentary. This piece was introduced as follows:

The philosophy of Plato and his continuing tradition rests on an affirmation that reality — however that term is understood — *is a systematic unity*, one which embraces the extended multiplicity we see around us. It is essentially a top-down system so that the First Principle of this 'All' is held to be the cause of all: as Plato's Seventh Letter poetically puts it, it is "the cause of beautiful things".

(...) if the whole of reality is understood as springing from a primal unity, then its unfolding can be seen as shaped by the nature of the law of cause — which is to say that everything we perceive in any way is the effect of a cause, and each of those prior causes is an effect of a yet higher cause, and this chain of causes and effects can be traced back to the First Principle, or the causeless cause.

It is not difficult to recognise some theosophical principles in this, such as the first Fundamental Proposition or the Law of Cause and Effect. Nor is this surprising, since the Platonic tradition is nothing but one of the branches of

The platonic tradition: the Ancient Greek (olive) branch of the tree of Theosophia

Universal wisdom is as old as mankind. This wisdom has been passed on in all ages and cultures by various messengers. These messengers spoke of a doctrine (*dharma*) a principle or way (*Tao*) or a wisdom of love (*philosophia*).⁽⁷⁾ Only afterwards were these traditions given names, such as Buddhism, Taoism, or Platonism. Another collective name for this universal or divine wisdom is Theosophia, or 'wisdom of the gods'. This name was already used by many philosophers in Alexandria in the third century of our era.⁽⁸⁾ In particular, they drew on the philosopher Plato (c. 427-347 B.C.) and were later called the Neoplatonists. Plato's teachings are usually considered the start of Western philosophy⁽⁹⁾, but those who study Plato's teachings and compare them with Eastern philosophy will recognise much of the Eastern thinking. In fact, Plato brought nothing but universal wisdom dressed in the garb appropriate to his Greek culture and time. In fact, Plato was a Theosophist.⁽¹⁰⁾

He is so not only because his teachings are consistent with what was later brought out about the Theosophia by theosophical messengers like H.P. Blavatsky and G. de Purucker. As Blavatsky writes: 'Theosophist is, who Theosophy does'⁽¹¹⁾ And actually that echoes Plato who argued that true knowledge or wisdom equals virtue. Knowing wisdom means being wise. You are only a Theosophist if you live theosophically. Unfortunately, not that much is known of Plato's own life, and he himself confessed that he kept quite a bit of it hidden.⁽¹²⁾ But what we know is that he was an inspiring example to many.

When we talk about the Platonic tradition, like many religions and philosophical traditions, it can be divided into an exoteric and an esoteric lineage. Exoteric means what is explicitly brought out, written down and transmitted from a doctrine. It can be understood intellectually and is also called the 'Eye Doctrine'. Esoteric, on the other hand, means 'hidden' or 'veiled'. It is the more mystical teaching that is transmitted from teacher to student and is also called the 'Heart-Doctrine'. It is those teachings that are passed on only under secrecy to those who have proved themselves worthy in their lives. So it is very difficult to find historical information about them. Sometimes a small hint or reference about it emerges in the few surviving writings. Another method of passing on esoteric teachings is by referring to them indirectly in the form of metaphors, myths or similes. Plato's dialogues are

full of such myths. They can only be understood if you have certain keys to deduce the correct meaning from them. Keys like the seven Jewels of Wisdom.⁽¹³⁾

After Plato, in the *exoteric* line mainly Aristotle, as a student of Plato, has been very influential for the development of science especially in the West. To this day, Plato and Aristotle are studied in the philosophy faculties of universities as important founders of Western philosophical thought, but mainly in an intellectual way.

However, Plato was also the founder of the Academy, a Mystery School in which teachings from the universal wisdom were transmitted esoterically.⁽¹⁴⁾ After his death, its leadership passed to his nephew Speusippos who continued the esoteric tradition. In the year 86 BC, the building of the Academy was destroyed by the Romans, but teaching continued elsewhere in Athens until the Neoplatonists rebuilt it around 400. Plotinus, who lived in the 3rd century, is considered the founder of Neoplatonism. He was himself in Alexandria a pupil of Ammonius Saccas, who did not put anything in writing.⁽¹⁵⁾ The new Neoplatonic Academy then existed until Emperor Justinian closed it in 529, after which the last seven philosophers found shelter with the Persian king Khosrau I.

During the Middle Ages, the church did not allow the spread of traditions other than Christian ones because they were seen as pagan. In the Islamic world at that time, Plato was still being studied. That situation lasted until the 15th century, when the Byzantine Plethon reintroduced Plato to the West. Together with Cosimo de Medici and Marsilio Ficino, among others, he opened a new Platonic Academy in Florence. Ficino translated Plato from Greek into Latin, allowing his ideas to spread further in Europe again. This marked the beginning of the Renaissance.

From the late 18th century, Thomas Taylor first translated Plato's dialogues into English. His work, as described in the article, had great influence on philosophers and intuitive writers in the British Empire and the United States. This formed part of the foundation on which Blavatsky was able to build in the last quarter of the 19th century.

Theosophia; see also the framed text.

Coming from a theosophical background, I therefore found it quite easy to fit in with the study. The study leader and the group provided an open, welcoming and inviting atmosphere. Suppose I had been a total newcomer, the study leader and the group would undoubtedly have done their best to let me come along. The study leader used practical examples to make the abstract ideas plausible and made connections to everyday practice. I cannot say other than that I experienced a very theosophical atmosphere.

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Questions children ask, part 2

In our previous issue we wrote about questions that children ask and how we can give appropriate answers to the sometimes very intuitive questions. We wrote about this because it is good to realize that these questions are important and offer opportunities. Children ask questions for a reason; they want to understand life. By helping them to think independently, we help them on their way during this quest. Obviously, this is not always easy, but we owe it to them. In addition, it offers us opportunities to deepen and broaden our own insights.

At the end of the article we raised the question:

**What would you answer to the question:
*Why is it warm in the earth?***



The answers given to this question were diverse. Below you can read some of the responses:

- Like us, the earth is a living being and has its own temperature. We are also warm inside.
- The earth is full of life, lots of powerful life, which warms the earth from within.
- Living beings that move (spin around) become warm inside and radiate energy. The earth is also a living being.

Whether the answer helped the child that raised the question along the way is not for us to determine. Only the child himself knows this and perhaps not even that yet.

New challenge

Recently we received new intriguing questions that we would like to present to you. What would you answer to the following questions?

- *Where does the earth come from?* This question was asked to one of our staff members by a ten-year-old girl at the Leiden Bee Market.
- A six-year-old girl was put to bed by her mother. Before falling asleep, she asked her mother “*You are my mommy and grandma was your mommy. Who was then the first mommy?*”
- *Where am I, when I sleep?*

We are very curious to hear your answer(s). We also would love to hear whether the answer to the question about heat in the earth, led to a discussion or follow-up question. If you would like to share this, you can send us the dialogue. You can send it to lucifer.red@stichtingisis.org.

Let's keep practicing and keep helping each other toward a greater truth.

Astrid Kramer

Questions & Answers

What does Krishna mean?

In the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, Krishna represents the source and essence of the entire Universe and also the charioteer and wise counselor of Arjuna, the archer. Can we say that Krishna represents the boundless? And what is the relationship with the human being called Krishna, who lived about 5,000 years ago and was one of the great Messengers? Furthermore, many Hindus regard Krishna as a god to be worshipped, one to whom they sacrifice regularly. So how can we see Krishna?

Answer

To better understand this, it is good to remember that in religious texts and mythologies, one concept – ‘Krishna’ in this case – can have multiple meanings. Those meanings are usually related to each other. They are often applications of the same basic idea at different levels, for example, at the levels of Cosmos, Earth and individual human being. The same is true of the meaning of Krishna.

In all mythologies, the meaning of the gods depends on the context. Among the ancient Greeks, for example, Zeus sometimes stood for the top of the Solar hierarchy, sometimes for ‘Universal Law’ (karma) and sometimes for the power of desire. As to the latter case, consider the story of Prometheus the *Light-bringer*, who was chained to material existence (the rock) by Zeus (our materially oriented desires).

Krishna as Ātman or the Logos

In the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, Krishna (chapter 10, verse 20) says: “I am the Self,” *Aham Ātman*. “My Seat is in the heart of every being.” This verse gives us a key. Krishna stands for the Universal Self, for Ātman, the Self with a capital S: the source and summit of the Universe. The ancient Greeks often called that principle the *Logos*.

And because every being within our Universe is a child or outflow of the one Ātman, every being carries within itself a ray of Ātman, as the highest principle within itself. Hence, “My Seat is in the heart of every being.” Consequently, the highest principle in you and me and all other human beings is the same: the *One* cosmic essence (Krishna), within which we all live, and from which we, symbolically seen, arise and into which we return, periodically. We find this basic idea – that the divine essence within us is one with the divine essence of the Kosmos – in every religion. Also in the *New Testament*, John 10:30, where Christ says, “I and the Father are one.” So, universal brotherhood is a fact: we are irrevocably connected, whether we realize it or not.

The relation between Krishna and the Boundless

Does that imply that Krishna is what we in Theosophy often call ‘the Boundless’? No, because there are countless Universes, and each of them has its own summit or Krishna. So there are infinitely many ‘Krishnas’ within the Boundless. Or in other words, each Krishna has another

‘Krishna’ above it. There is no absolute top; each top is relative. In fact, we as individual human beings are a mini-kosmos, and our deepest Self too can rightly be called Krishna. The ‘Boundless’ is featureless, unnameable, unthinkable, for it encompasses an infinite variety of expressions of life. The Boundless is not a being, it is not a force, and therefore it is not a source. One can only say that it IS.⁽¹⁾

Subba Row, an Indian Theosophist who worked closely with Mrs. Blavatsky, gives exemplary expert explanations on the meaning of Krishna as *Logos* in a series of lectures, later compiled in his book *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gītā*.⁽²⁾ He also explains why in a few places in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* Krishna declares to be one with Parabrahman. Parabrahman means ‘beyond Brahman’, beyond the highest god we can imagine. Parabrahman thus indicates the LIFE beyond our hierarchy and is therefore sometimes equated with the Boundless, or the Unnameable.

So it seems contradictory when Krishna says he is one with Parabrahman, but this is not the case. As an *expression* of Parabrahman, Krishna can identify himself with Parabrahman. After all, everyone in the depths of his being is the Boundless. Subba Row puts it this way, “... it (the Logos, Krishna) is not different in substance, as it were, or in essence, from *Parabrahman*, and yet at the same time it is different from it in having an individualized existence. (...) It has consciousness and an individuality of its own.”⁽³⁾ In fact, the Logos is not unknowable like

Parabrahman, but belongs to the highest knowledge that man can make his own.⁽⁴⁾

Krishna within us

The Krishna within us, as we said, represents our immortal, higher nature, our deepest core. From our higher nature all noble and elevating impulses flow into our mind, if we are willing to listen to our Inner Teacher — our Krishna. In the symbolism of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*: Krishna is the wise advisor and Arjuna — who stands for every human consciousness, Subba Row explains — is the warrior on the Path of Inner Growth, who faces the choice: do I listen to my higher Self (Krishna) or not? Do I act accordingly or not? Krishna can give advice, and it is up to us, Arjunas, to express that advice in the practice of life or not. It is we who have to ‘battle’ ...

Krishna as Avatāra

Now we come to the historical fact, that about 5,000 years ago a great Messenger of Wisdom and Compassion worked among men, by the name of Krishna. Krishna was an Avatāra, and that means that at certain times the direct influence of a divine being was flowing through this human being, so that actually a divine impulse could be brought into the human world — through the channel of a far advanced human being. In the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, Krishna (who represents this divine influence) says: “And thus I incarnate from age to age for the preservation of the just, the destruction of the wicked, and the establishment of righteousness.”⁽⁵⁾

We are taught that at the time Krishna died, in 3102 BCE, a long evolutionary period of mankind closed (the Dwāpara-yuga) and another long cycle began (the Kali-yuga).⁽⁶⁾

Should Krishna be worshipped?

The final point raised by the questioner is the fact that many Hindus see Krishna as a god to be worshipped. People around the world tend to anthropomorphize the gods, by assigning all sorts of human characteristics to them. When you pray to Krishna in the hope of receiving some kind of reward, Krishna has just as degenerate a function as the saints have in the Catholic Church: you hope that forces *outside you* will solve your problems. But we can only do that ourselves.

It is true that in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* Arjuna is prompted to ‘devote all his thoughts and actions to Krishna’, but this does not mean the worship of a god outside ourselves, because Krishna is our own inner god. Our inner Krishna lives in the realization of unity, of the inseparable union of all beings. Arjuna — that is, us! — is inspired to develop the divine qualities within him. At the beginning of the sixteenth chapter of the *Gītā*, those characteristics are summed up. We mention some of them: fearlessness, purity of thought, steadfastness in Yoga through wisdom, righteousness, love of truth, gentleness, restrainedness, modesty. In short, they are ‘the gentle forces’ flowing from universal love and compassion. To develop these qualities is the best ‘worship’ of Krishna.

In fact, you can find in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* that the only meaningful sacrifices lie in sacrificing your selfish tendencies, and that the only meaningful worship is, to start living from the idea of universal brotherhood. How else could you worship the underlying oneness (Krishna), than by being focused continually on the welfare of all that lives? After all, our des-

tiny is inseparably linked to the destiny of our fellow human beings and all other kinds of beings. An intuitive verse from the *Bhagavad-Gītā* deals with this.⁽⁷⁾

Those gifts which are bestowed at the proper time to the proper person and by men who are not desirous of a return, are of a *sattva* [truth, wisdom; ed.] quality.

So, thinking about the meaning of Krishna is worth a lot. Then we discover, among other things, that all religions assume a divine element *in* man: the Inspirer and Teacher from which we can draw wisdom every instant we focus on it.

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Agenda

Preview of the 2024-2025 lecture season

In 2025, the Theosophical Society (T.S.) will celebrate its 150th anniversary. With what purpose did H.P. Blavatsky and her Masters found the T.S. in 1875? Which basic ideas did H.P.B. introduce, stepwise, in the thought atmosphere of the world of her time? And how did these ideas work out in social, scientific and religious reforms? A great responsibility lies on our shoulders, as students of Theosophia. How do we keep the original teachings pure and effectively inspiring? Are we able to transform them to our present fellow human beings in such a way, that the impulse of 1875 is strengthened – instead of constricted or diluted?

From February to June 2025, our lectures are focused on the above questions. The titles of these lectures will be given in the next issue of *Lucifer, the Lightbringer*. The four preceding series, from September to February, give you an insightful overall view of Theosophia and some of its most important applications in society. So, these first four series are an excellent preparation for the 2025 lectures. *Check our website for the full program that will be online soon.*

Series 1, October – November

Universal Wisdom

- 06-10 What lies hidden in your consciousness?
- 13-10 Study meeting on lecture of 06-10
- 20-10 Laws of Life in man and cosmos
- 27-10 Study meeting on lecture of 20-10
- 03-11 Helena Petrovna Blavatsky lecture: lecture by guest speaker.
- 10-11 Study meeting on lecture of 03-11

Series 2, November – December

The insanity of war: time to act like HUMANS again

- 17-11 Karma and the World's Conscience
- 24-11 Study meeting on lecture of 17-11
- 01-12 The alchemical transformation of war to peace
How do you reconcile with your 'enemy'?
- 08-12 Study meeting on lecture of 01-12

Series 3, December – January

A non-political view of the global political climate

- 15-12 2024: our right, duty, responsibility to vote

- 22-12 Study meeting on lecture of 15-12
- 05-01 A wise democracy
- 12-01 Study meeting on lecture of 05-01

Series 4, January – February

The Mystical Birth

- 19-01 The four sacred moments of the year
- 26-01 Study meeting on lecture of 19-01
- 02-02 The Silent Watcher as Initiator
- 09-02 Study meeting on lecture of 02-02

Course Universal Wisdom

Starting again in October

This course is held online, via videoconferencing.

The course is based on the core of wisdom that underlies all great religions and philosophies. This wisdom is known by several names, such as Esoteric Philosophy, Theosophia. The core of universal wisdom teaches us that unity and compassion are the foundations of Life. If anything is clear, it is that these are the missing links that the world today so desperately needs. By applying the wisdom in this course, you will help fill this gap.

The lessons

1. Unity
2. Reality and illusion
3. Seven thought aspects
4. 'Man, know thyself'
5. Interim research
6. Thoughts and ennobling your character
7. Cyclicity and karma
8. Hierarchies of consciousness and the process of emanation
9. Self-realization and progressive evolution
10. Building an image of an ideal
11. Two paths, a principled choice
12. Knowing the SELF
13. Unveiled thinking
14. Theosophical Society - Point Loma

The course is held online via Zoom, weekly from October to May on Sundays at 16.00-18.00 CE(S)T.

The contribution for the course is € 60,-

Info and registration: blavatskyhouse.org/courses/.

Colophon

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I.S.I.S. Foundation

The name of the Foundation [Stichting] is
'Stichting International Study-centre for
Independent Search for truth'. Its registered
office is in The Hague, The Netherlands.

The object of the Foundation is to form a
nucleus of Universal Brotherhood by
disseminating knowledge about the spiritual
structure of human beings and the cosmos,
free from dogma.

The Foundation endeavors to accomplish this
object by giving courses, organizing public and
other speeches and lectures, issuing books,
brochures and other publications, and by
drawing on all other resources available to it.

I.S.I.S. Foundation is a non-profit organization,
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of the tax authorities, I.S.I.S. Foundation has
what is called ANBI status.
ANBI stands for General Benefit Organisation
(Algemeen Nut Beogende Instelling).
The most important requisites in obtaining this
ANBI status are:

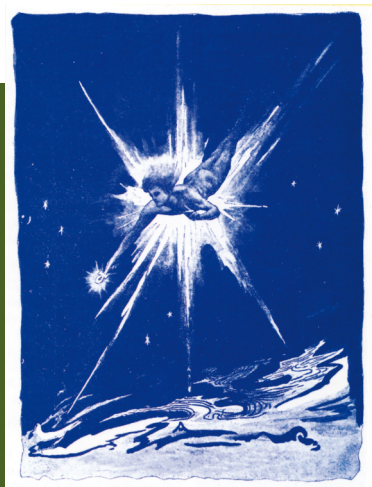
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earnings. Any profit earned from for
example book sales, must be fully used for
general beneficial activities. For I.S.I.S.
Foundation, this is spreading the Theo-
sophia. (We refer to the statutes, aims and
principles for further information.)
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whereby a director or policymaker cannot
dictate over this property as though it were
his own.
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only consist of a reimbursement for
expenses and attendance.

I.S.I.S. Foundation ANBI number is 50872.

I.S.I.S. Foundation

The activities of the I.S.I.S. Foundation (International Study-centre for Independent Search for truth) are based on:

1. The essential unity of all that exists.
2. By reason of this unity: brotherhood as a fact in nature.
3. Respect for everyone's free will (when applied from this idea of universal brotherhood).
4. Respect for everyone's freedom to build up their own view of life.
5. To support the developing of everyone's own view of life and its application in daily practice.



Why this journal is called *Lucifer*

Lucifer literally means Bringer of Light.

Each culture in the East and West has his bringers of light: inspiring individuals who give the initial impulse to spiritual growth and social reform. They stimulate independent thinking and living with a profound awareness of brotherhood.

These bringers of light have always been opposed and slandered by the establishment. But there are always those who refuse to be put off by these slanderers, and start examining the wisdom of the bringers of light in an open-minded and unprejudiced way.

For these people this journal is written.

“... the title chosen for our magazine is as much associated with divine ideas as with the supposed rebellion of the hero of Milton's *Paradise Lost* ...

We work for true Religion and Science, in the interest of fact as against fiction and prejudice. It is our duty – as it is that of physical Science – to throw light on facts in Nature hitherto surrounded by the darkness of ignorance ... But natural Sciences are only one aspect of SCIENCE and TRUTH. Psychological and moral Sciences, or theosophy, the knowledge of divine truth, are still more important ...”

(Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in the first issue of *Lucifer*, September 1887)