

SYMBOLS AND KEYS

Articles by William Q. Judge

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TWO LOST KEYS

A COMMENTARY ON THE GAYATRI

THEOSOPHICAL SYMBOLISM

THEOSOPHICAL SYMBOLS

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AUM!

THE most sacred mystic syllable of the Vedas is Aum. It is the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, and by some it is thought to be the sound made by a new born child when the breath is first drawn into the lungs. The daily prayers of the Hindu Brahmin are begun and ended with it, and the ancient sacred books say that with that syllable the gods themselves address the most Holy One.

In the Chandogya Upanishad¹ its praises are sung in these words:

Let a man meditate on the syllable OM, called the udgitha,² ... it is the best of all essences, the highest, deserving the highest place, the eighth.

It is then commanded to meditate on this syllable as the breath, of two kinds, in the body—the vital breath and the mere breath in the mouth or lungs, for by this meditation come knowledge and proper performance of sacrifice. In verse 10 is found:

Now, therefore, it would seem to follow that both he who knows the true meaning of OM, and he who does not, perform the same sacrifice. But this is not so, for knowledge and ignorance are different. The sacrifice which a man performs with knowledge, faith, and the Upanishad is more powerful.

Outwardly the same sacrifice is performed by both, but that performed by him who has knowledge and has meditated on the secret meaning of OM partakes of the qualities inhering in OM, which need just that knowledge and faith as the medium through which they may become visible and active. If a jeweler and a mere ploughman sell a precious stone, the knowledge of the former bears better fruit than

¹ Khandogya Upanishad, 1st Khanda. See Vol. i, *Sacred Books of the East*, Muller.

² Hymn of Praise to Brahm.

the ignorance of the latter.

Shankaracharya in his *Sharir Bhashya* dwells largely on OM, and in the *Vayu Purana* a whole chapter is devoted to it. Now as Vayu is air, we can see in what direction the minds of those who were concerned with that purana were tending. They were analyzing sound, which will lead to discoveries of interest regarding the human spiritual and physical constitution. In sound is Tone, and Tone is one of the most important and deep reaching of all natural things. By tone, the natural man and the child express the feelings, just as animals in their tones make known their nature. The tone of the voice of the tiger is quite different from that of the dove, as different as their natures are from each other, and if the sights, sounds, and objects in the natural world mean anything, or point the way to any laws underlying these differences, then there is nothing puerile in considering the meaning of tone.

The Padma Purana says:

“The syllable OM is the leader of all prayers; let it therefore be employed in the beginning of all prayers,” and Manu in his laws ordains: “A Brahmin, at the beginning and end of a lesson on the Vedas, must always pronounce the syllable OM, for unless OM precede, his learning will slip away from him, and unless it follows, nothing will be long retained.”

The celebrated Hindoo Raja, Ramohun Roy, in a treatise on this letter, says:

“OM, when considered as one letter, uttered by the help of one articulation, is the symbol of the Supreme Spirit. ‘One letter (OM) is the emblem of the Most High, Manu II, 83.’ But when considered as a trilateral word consisting of **A** (a), **C** (u), **—** (m) it implies the three *Vedas*, the three *states* of human nature, the three *divisions* of the universe, and the three *deities*—Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, agents in the *creation*, *preservation*, and *destruction* of this world; or, properly speaking, the three principal attributes of the Supreme Being personified in those three deities. In this sense it implies, in fact, the universe controlled by the Supreme Spirit.”

Now we may consider that there is pervading the whole universe a single homogeneous resonance, sound, or tone, which acts, so to

speak, as the awakener or vivifying power, stirring all the molecules into action. This is what is represented in all languages by the vowel *a*, which takes precedence of all others. This is the word, the *verbum*, the *Logos* of St. John of the Christians, who says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.”⁸ This is creation, for without this resonance or motion among the quiescent particles, there would be no visible universe. That is to say, upon sound, or, as the Aryans called it, *Nada Brahma* (divine resonance), depends the evolution of the visible from the invisible.

But this sound *a*, being produced, at once alters itself into *au*, so that the second sound *u* is that one made by the first in continuing its existence. The vowel *w*, which in itself is a compound one, therefore represents preservation. And the idea of preservation is contained also in creation, or evolution, for there could not be anything to preserve, unless it had first come into existence.

If these two sounds, so compounded into one, were to proceed indefinitely, there would be of course no destruction of them. But it is not possible to continue the utterance further than the breath, and whether the lips are compressed, or the tongue pressed against the roof of the mouth, or the organs behind that used, there will be in the finishing of the utterance the closure or *m* sound, which among the Aryans had the meaning of *stoppage*. In this last letter there is found the destruction of the whole word or letter. To reproduce it a slight experiment will show that by no possibility can it be begun with *m*, but that *au* invariably commences even the utterance of *m* itself. Without fear of successful contradiction, it can be asserted that all speech begins with *au*, and the ending, or destruction of speech, is in *m*.

The word “tone” is derived from the Latin and Greek words meaning sound and tone. In the Greek the word “tonos” means a “stretching” or “straining.” As to the character of the sound, the word “tone” is used to express all varieties, such as high, low, grave, acute, sweet, and harsh sounds. In music it gives the peculiar quality of the sound produced, and also distinguishes one instrument from another;

³ St. John, Ch. I v. I.

as rich tone, reedy tone, and so on. In medicine, it designates the state of the body, but is there used more in the signification of strength, and refers to strength or tension. It is not difficult to connect the use of the word in medicine with the divine resonance of which we spoke, because we may consider tension to be the vibration, or quantity of vibration, by which sound is apprehended by the ear; and if the whole system gradually goes down so that its tone is lowered without stoppage, the result will at last be dissolution for that collection of molecules. In painting, the tone also shows the general drift of the picture, just as it indicates the same thing in morals and manners. We say, “a low tone of morals, an elevated tone of sentiment, a courtly tone of manners,” so that tone has a signification which is applied universally to either good or bad, high or low. And the only letter which we can use to express it, or symbolize it, is the *a* sound, in its various changes, long, short, and medium. And just as the *tone* of manners, of morals, of painting, of music, means the real character of each, in the same way the tones of the various creatures, including man himself, mean or express the real character; and all together joined in the deep murmur of nature go to swell the *Nada Brahma*, or Divine resonance, which at last is heard as the music of the spheres.

Meditation on tone, as expressed in this Sanskrit word OM, will lead us to a knowledge of the secret Doctrine. We find expressed in the merely mortal music the seven divisions of the divine essence, for as the microcosm is the little copy of the macrocosm, even the halting measures of man contain the little copy of the whole, in the seven tones of the octave. From that we are led to the seven colors, and so forward and upward to the Divine radiance which is the Aum. For the Divine Resonance, spoken of above, is not the Divine Light itself. The Resonance is only the outbreathing of the first sound of the entire Aum. This goes on during what the Hindoos call a Day of Brahma, which, according to them, lasts a thousand ages.⁴ It manifests itself not only as the power which stirs up and animates the particles of Universe, but also in the evolution and dissolution of man, of the animal and mineral kingdoms, and of solar systems. Among the Aryans

it was represented in the planetary system by Mercury, who has always been said to govern the intellectual faculties and to be the universal stimulator. Some old writers have said that it is shown through Mercury, amongst mankind, by the universal talking of women.

And wherever this Divine Resonance is closed or stopped by death or other change, the Aum has been uttered there. These utterances of Aum are only the numerous microcosmic enunciations of the Word, which is uttered or completely ended, to use the Hermetic or mystical style of language, only when the great Brahm stops the outbreathing, closes the vocalization, by the *m* sound, and thus causes the universal dissolution. This universal dissolution is known in the Sanskrit and in the secret Doctrine as the *Maha Pralaya*, *Maha* being “the great,” and *Pralaya* “dissolution.” And so, after thus arguing, the ancient Rishies of India said: “Nothing is begun or ended; everything is changed, and that which we call death is only a transformation.” In thus speaking they wished to be understood as referring to the manifested universe, the so-called death of a sentient creature being only a transformation of energy, or a change of the mode and place of manifestation of the Divine Resonance. Thus early in the history of the race the doctrine of conservation of energy was known and applied. The Divine Resonance, or the *au* sound, is the universal energy, which is conserved during each Day of Brahma, and at the coming on of the great Night is absorbed again into the whole. Continually appearing and disappearing it transforms itself again and again, covered from time to time by a veil of matter called its visible manifestation, and never lost, but always changing itself from one form to another. And herein can be seen the use and beauty of the Sanskrit. *Nada Brahma* is Divine Resonance; that is, after saying *Nada*, if we stopped with Brahm, logically we must infer that them sound at the end of Brahm signified the *Pralaya*, thus confuting the position that the Divine Resonance existed, for if it had stopped it could not be resounding. So they added *ana* at the end of the Brahm, making it possible to understand that as *Brahma* the sound was still manifesting itself. But time would not suffice to go into this subject as it deserves, and these remarks are only intended as a feeble attempt

⁴ See Bhagavad-Gita

to point out the real meaning and purpose of Aum.

For the above reasons, and out of the great respect we entertain for the wisdom of the Aryans, was the symbol adopted and placed upon the cover of this magazine and at the head of the text.

With us OM has a signification. It represents the constant undercurrent of meditation, which ought to be carried on by every man, even while engaged in the necessary duties of this life. There is for every conditioned being a target at which the aim is constantly directed. Even the very animal kingdom we do not except, for it, below us, awaits its evolution into a higher state; it unconsciously perhaps, but nevertheless actually, aims at the same target.

“Having taken the bow, the great weapon, let him place on it the arrow, sharpened by devotion. Then, having drawn it with a thought directed to that which is, hit the mark, O friend,—the Indestructible. OM is the bow, the Self is the arrow, Brahman is called its aim. It is to be hit by a man who is not thoughtless; and then as the arrow becomes one with the target, he will become one with Brahman. Know him alone as the Self, and leave off other words. He is the bridge of the Immortal. Meditate on the Self as OM. Hail to you that you may cross beyond the sea of darkness.”⁶

AUM!

HADJI-ERINN

Path, April, 1886

WHAT IS THE UDGITHA?

Jamestown, April 16th, 1886

DEAR BROTHER:—Will you kindly explain, through THE PATH, what is to be understood, by the *Udgitha*, or hymn of praise to Brahm? With best wishes for the success of your enterprise, I remain,

Fraternally yours,
L.J.

THIS is a vital question. It may have arisen from the peculiarity of the word inquired about, or it may be that our brother really knows the importance of the point. We refer him to the article upon OM in the April number. OM is the Udgitha, and OM has been explained in that article. Read between the lines; and read also the “Upanishad Notes” in this month’s PATH.

In the *Maitrayana-Brahmana-Upanishad*, (Pr. VI), it is said:

The Udgitha, called Pranava, the leader, the bright, the sleepless, free from old age and death, three footed (waking, dream, and deep sleep), consisting of three letters and likewise to be known as fivefold, is placed in the cave of the heart.

This is the Self. Not the mere body or the faculties of the brain, but the Highest Self. And that must be meditated on, or worshipped, with a constant meditation. *Hymn of praise*, then, means that we accept the existence of that Self and aspire to or adore Him. Therefore, it is said again, in the same Upanishad:

In the beginning Brahman was all this. He was one, and in finite. . . . The Highest Self is not to be fixed, he is unlimited, unborn, not to be reasoned about, not to be conceived. He is, \like the ether, everywhere, and at the destruction of the Universe, he alone is awake. Thus from that ether he wakes all this world, which consists of (his) thought only, and by him alone is all this meditated on, and in him it is dissolved. His is that luminous

⁶Mundaka Upanishad, II. Kh. 2. (Muller’s Tr.)

orm which shines in the sun, and the manifold light in the smokeless fire. ...
He who is in the fire, and he who is in the heart, and he who is in the sun,
they *are one and the same*. He who knows this becomes one with the One.

Now, “to know” this, does not mean to merely apprehend the statement, but actually become personally acquainted with it by interior experience. And this is difficult. But it is to be sought after. And the first step to it is the attempt to realize universal brotherhood, for when one becomes identified with the One, who is all, he “participates in the souls of all creatures”; surely then the first step in the path is universal brotherhood.

The hymn of praise to Brahm (which is Brahman) is the real object of this magazine, and of our existence. The hymn is used, in the sacrifice, when verbally expressed, and we can offer it in our daily existence, in each act, whether eating, sleeping, waking, or in any state. A man can hardly incorporate this idea in his being and not be spiritually and morally benefitted.

But we cannot fully explain here, as it is to be constantly referred to in this magazine.—[Ed.]

Path, May, 1886

STUDIES IN THE UPANISHADS

BY A STUDENT

MANY American theosophists are asking, “What are the Upanishads?” They are a portion of the ancient Aryan literature which this journal has set itself to help lay before theosophists of America, to the end that whatever in them is good and true may be brought out. As Max Müller says, hitherto the Upanishads have not received at the hands of Sanskrit and oriental scholars, that treatment which in the eyes of philosophers and theologians they seem so fully to deserve. He also calls them “ancient theosophic treatises” and declares that his real love for Sanskrit literature was first kindled by them.¹ They have received no treatment at all in the United States, because they are almost absolutely unknown in the original tongue in this country, and in translations, have been but little studied here. Europe and America differ in this, that while in England and Germany nearly all such study is confined to the book-worm or the theologian, here there is such a general diffusion of pretty fair education in the people, that the study of these books, as translated, may be made popular, a thing which in Europe is perhaps impossible.

Müller returned to the study of the Upanishads after a period of thirty years, during which he had devoted himself to the hymns and Brahmanas of the Vedas, and found his interest in them undiminished. As for the period of these treatises, he says that has been fixed *provisionally* at about 800 B.C.

The word means “secret charm,” “philosophical doctrine”; and more strictly, “to sit down near.” Hindu theologians say the Upanishads belong to revealed religion in opposition to that which is traditional. In

¹ Sacred Books of the East, Vol. I, lxx

the opinion of our friend Miiller, to whom all western students must ever remain grateful no matter how much they may disagree with his views as to the Vedas being the lisplings of baby man, “the earliest of these philosophical treatises will always maintain a place in the literature of the world, among the most astounding productions of the human mind in any age and in any country.”²

Professor Weber placed the number of Upanishads at 235⁸; in 1865 Miiller put them at 149, and others added to that number, so that even today the actual figures are not known. Indeed it is held by several Orientalists, that before they assumed their present form, a large mass of traditional Upanishads must have existed.

The meaning of the word which ought to be borne most in mind is, “secret knowledge, or true knowledge,” although there may be a Upanishad or secret knowledge, which is false.

In the Chandogya Upanishad (I, i), after describing the deeper meaning of OM, it is said that the sacrifice which a man performs with knowledge, with faith, and with the Upanishad, *i.e.*, with an understanding of the secret charm, or underlying principles and effects, is more powerful than when with faith, the only knowledge possessed is of the rites themselves, their origin and regularity. The sacrifice referred to is, not alone the one offered on the altar in the temple, but that daily sacrifice which every breath and every thought, brings about in ourselves.

THE MUNDAKA UPANISHAD

This is in the *Atharva Veda*. Although it has the form of a mantra, it is not to be used in the sacrifices, as its sole object is to teach the highest knowledge, the knowledge of Brahman, which cannot be obtained by either worship or sacrifices. Offerings to the Gods, in no matter what mode or church, restraining of the breath, penances, or cultivation of the psychic senses, will not lead to the true knowledge. Yet some works have to be performed, and many persons require

works, sacrifices and penances as stepping stones to a higher life. In the progress of these works and sacrificial performances, errors are gradually discovered by the individual himself. He can then remove them. So the Hindu commentators have explained the title of this Upanishad as the “shaving” one. That is, it cuts off the errors of the mind like a razor. It is said by European scholars that the title has not yet been explained. This may be quite correct for them, but it is very certain the Hindu explanation appears to the Hindu mind to be a very good one. Let us proceed.

FIRST MUNDAKA

This means, first shaving, or beginning of the process for removing error. It may be considered as a division equivalent to “first title,” after which follow the lesser divisions, as: *First Khan da*.

1. Brahma was the first of the Devas, the maker of the universe, the preserver of the world. He told the knowledge of Brahman, the foundation of all knowledge, to his eldest son Atharvan.

Here at once should be noted, that although in Hindu theology we find Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, as the creator, preserver and destroyer, forming the Trinity, the Upanishad now before us—for cutting away error—has not such a division. It says Brahma is first, also the maker and the preserver. Even knowledge that is true for certain stages of development becomes error when we rise up into the higher planes and desire to know the true. Similarly we find Buddha in his congregation teaching his disciples by means of the “three vehicles,” but when he had raised them to the higher plane, he informed them that these vehicles might be discarded and *sat* or truth be approached through one vehicle.

The knowledge here spoken of is Brahman knowledge which is the supreme vehicle.

2. Whatever Brahma told Atharvan, that knowledge Atharvan told to Angir, he told it to Satyavaha Bharadvaga, and he in succession told it to Angiras.

3. Saunaka, the great housholder, approached Angiras respectfully and asked: “Sir, what is that through which if it is known, everything else becomes known?”

²Sacred Books, &c., Vol. I, lxvii

³Hist. of Sans. Lit., p. 155, note.

4. He said to him: “Two kinds of knowledge must be known, this is what all who know Brahman tell us, the higher and the lower knowledge.”

5. “The lower knowledge is the Rig-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Sama-Veda, Atharva-Veda, Phonetics, Ceremonial, Grammar, Etymology, Metre and Astronomy; but the higher knowledge is that by which the Indestructible (Brahman) is apprehended.”

6. “That which cannot be seen nor seized, which has no origin and is without qualities, no eyes nor ears, no hands nor feet, the eternal, the all pervading, infinitesimal, that which is imperishable, that is what is regarded by the wise as the source of all beings.”

7. “As the spider sends forth and draws in its thread, as plants grow on the earth, as from every man hairs spring forth on the head and the body, thus does everything arise here from the Indestructible.”

8. “The Brahman swells by means of meditation; hence is produced matter; from matter mind, breath and intellect, the seven worlds, and from the works performed by men in the worlds, the eternal effects, rewards and punishment of works.”

9. “From Him who perceives all and who knows all, whose meditation consists of knowledge, from that highest Brahman is born that other Hiranyagarbha—name, form, and matter.”

This Khanda unfolds broadly the whole philosophy. The following ones go into particulars. It is very easy here to see that the imperishable doctrine could not be communicated directly by the Great Brahma to man, but it has to be filtered down through various channels. The communicator of it to mortals, however, would be regarded by his finite auditors as a god. The same method is observable in the *Bagavad-Gita* (Ch. iv) where Krishna says to Arjuna that “this never failing doctrine I formerly taught unto Vivasvat and he to Manu, who told it to Ikswaku, succeeding whom came the Rajarshis who studied it.” Manu is regarded as of a wholly Divine nature although not the Great Brahm.

Now, when Angiras, as detailed in the Upanishad, had received this higher knowledge, he was approached by a great householder, by name Saunaka. This has reference to an ancient mode of life in India when Saunaka would be called a grihastha, or one who was performing all his duties to his family, his tribe, and his nation while still in the world. All the while, however, he studied the knowledge of Brahman,

so that when the proper time came for him to give up those duties of life, he could either die or retire to solitude. It was not considered then to be a virtue for one to violently sever all ties and assume the garb and life of a mendicant devoted to religious contemplation, but the better way was thought to be that one which resulted in our, so to speak, consuming all the Karma of our family in ourselves. Otherwise it would inevitably result that if he retired with many duties unfulfilled, they waited, figuratively speaking, for him, sure to attach to him in a succeeding incarnation and to work him either injury or obstruction. So it was thought better to work out all such results in the present life as far as possible.

We find here also a foreshadowing of some ideas held by the Greek philosophers. In the third verse, the question is asked: “What is that through which when it is known, the knower thereof knows everything else?” Some of the Greeks said that we must first ascend to the general, from which descent to the particular is easy. Such, however, is directly opposite to the modern method, which delights in going from particulars to generals, from effects to causes. The true knowledge proceeds as shown in the Upanishad. By endeavoring to attain to the Universal Soul of all, the knowledge of the particular parts may be gained. This is not easy, but it is easy to try. At the same time do not forsake modern methods altogether, which correspond to the lower knowledge spoken of in Verse 5. Therefore Angiras says: Two kinds of knowledge, the lower and the higher, must be known.

Here and there are persons who seem not to need the lower knowledge, who pay no attention to it, and who apprehend the higher flights impossible for others. This is what is known as the result of past births. In previous incarnations these persons studied upon all the lower planes so that their spiritual perceptions do not now need that help and training which the lower knowledge gives to others. They are approaching that state which is beautifully described by Longfellow in his “Rain in Summer,” in these words:—

Thus the seer,
With vision clear,
Sees forms appear and disappear,

In the perpetual round of strange,
 Mysterious change
 From birth to death, from death to birth;
 From earth to heaven, from heaven to earth;
 Till glimpses more sublime,
 Of things unseen before,
 Unto his wondering eyes reveal
 The Universe, as an immeasurable wheel
 Turning forevermore
 In the rapid and rushing river of Time.

Longfellow, in the lines last quoted, symbolized the Universe by an immeasurable wheel forever turning in the stream of time. Allowing for the western habit of studying effects and not causes, this is a fair simile. Yet it is faulty in that it presupposes two co-existing eternities; the wheel of the Universe, and the stream in which it turns. There can be but one eternity.

Saunaka asks in this Upanishad a natural question, propounded by nearly every thinking man, especially by students of occultism who are continually seeking a royal road to the accomplishment of their objects. He wishes to be told what may be the great solvent of all knowledge. The reply of An-giras points out two great roads, which include all the others. The lower road is the one of hard work for countless births, during which we acquire knowledge slowly in all directions, and, of course, when that is possessed, one rises to the higher road.

This is the true initiation, nature, so to speak, acting as the initiator. In replying to Saunaka, Angiras did not mean to be understood, that a man could in one birth pass over the lower road, but that the progress of a human monad toward perfection proceeded in a certain fixed manner which included all experiences. Of course if we say that we appear on the earth once only, and then disappear from it, to the place

called by the spiritualists of America, "the summer land," and by the christian, "heaven," there is no need for one to acquire the lower knowledge, for that might be obtained in the life after death. But we regard it as true that the spirit, in order to acquire complete knowledge, must inhabit a human form, and one term of tenancy in such a form will not be enough for the testing of the countless varieties of life, of temptation, of triumph, failure and success.

The sage Angiras in this Upanishad looks at man from the standpoint of one who can see the great stream of life which flows through the eternal plain, and therefore he could not have meant to apply his words to one incarnation, but to the whole series through which man has to pass until he reaches "immortal, blest nirvana."

In the journey along this road we will encounter great differences in the powers of our fellow travellers. Some go haltingly and others quickly; some with eyes bent on the ground, a few with gaze fixed on the great goal. Those who halt or look down will not reach the end, because they refuse to take the assistance to be found in the constant aspiration to the light. But we are not to blame them: they have not yet been often enough initiated to understand their error. Nature is kind and will wait for them much longer than their human fellows would if they were permitted to be their judges. This ought to give us a lesson in charity, in universal brotherhood. Very often we meet those who show an utter inability to appreciate some spiritual ideas which we quite understand. It is because they have not, so far, been able to transmute into a part of themselves, that which we have been so fortunate as to become possessed of, and so they seem devoted to things that to us appear to be of small value.

The Bagavad-Gita says that there is no detriment or loss to one's efforts in any direction, be it good or bad; that is, in going through these countless incarnations, all inquiry, every sort of investigation, no matter even if it seems at the close of any one life that the life was wasted, is so much energy and experience stored up. For although, in the course of one existence, physical energy is expended, there is, all the while, a storing up of spiritual energy which is again a power in the next succeeding life.

In consequence of the modern, western system of education, we are apt constantly to forget the existence of the great Force and value belonging to our super-sensuous consciousness. That consciousness is the great register where we record the real results of our various earthly experiences; in it we store up the spiritual energy, and once stored there, it becomes immortal, our own eternal possession. The question then will be asked: "How is one to store up such spiritual energy: do we do it unconsciously, and how are we to know that any has been stored up?" It is to be done by trying to know and to act truth; by "living in the eternal," as *Light on the Path* directs. To live thus in the eternal, does not mean that we shall abandon the cares and struggles of life, for so surely as we do we must suffer, but that we should try to make the real self direct its aspirations ever to the eternal truth.

This series of births is absolutely necessary, so that the "lower knowledge" can be acquired; and just so long as we do not acquire that, we must be reborn. Here and there will occur exceptions to this rule, in those great souls who, with "an astonishing violence," leap beyond and over all barriers, and by getting the higher knowledge, become at the same time, possessors of the lower knowledge also.

In the Chaldean Oracles such souls are thus described: "More robust souls perceive truth through themselves, and are of a more inventive nature," and by Proklus in I Alkibiad: "such a soul being saved, according to the oracle, through its own strength." But even this rapid progress must be regarded as comparative, for even these 'robust souls,' had to go through certain incarnations in which they were accumulating to themselves that very strength and ability to outstrip their fellows which, later on, placed them in the front rank.

In consequence of our ignorance of what we really are, not knowing at the time we begin the struggle in this present life whether the real man inside has passed through incarnations full of this necessary experience or not, we must not, because of the fancied importance we give ourselves, neglect the *lower knowledge*. There are many pitfalls besetting the road. Perchance we feel a certain degree of illumination, or we are able to see or hear in the astral world, and at

once the temptation presents itself to claim to ourselves a spiritual greatness not our own. The possession of such astral acuteness is not high spirituality *per se*, for one might be able, as Buddha declares in the Saddharma-Pundarika, to smell the extraordinary odors arising in ten points of space which are not perceived by ordinary people, or to hear the innumerable and strange voices, sounds, bells, discords and harmonies produced by the whole host of unknown and unseen spirits of the earth, air, water and fire, and still be altogether devoid of spirituality. If we let ourselves then, be carried away by this, it is only a form of pride that precedes a severe fall. Being carried away with it, is at once a proof that we are not master, but are mastered by what is merely a novel experience.

But if we wisely and carefully test all experience, being willing to descend low enough to learn and study so that the instrument may be tuned and perfected, we may avoid the pitfalls, or be able to cross them should they be inevitable, whereas if we are deluded by supposed self-illumination, and run after that to the exclusion of all study, we will perhaps, enjoy a period of excitement and of self-satisfaction, but it will end, and the end will be bitter. As Buddha says: "He who ignores the rotation of mundane existences, has no perception of blessed rest."

The very fact that a man is in the world and has a continual fight with his passions and inclinations, proves that he is not yet in any condition to leave it. And of even the very far advanced, it was said by those who were near the time of the Upanishads:

"The disciple who by his discrimination has escaped from the triple world, thinks he has reached pure, blessed nirvana; but it is only by knowing all the laws of the lower world, and the universal laws as well, that the immortal, pure, blest nirvana is reached. There is no real nirvana without all-know-ingness; try to reach this."

These notes are not technical studies of forms of speech, but simply attempts to discover the true meaning underlying the words of the Upanishads. These ancient works are full of food for reflection;

they should be studied with a view of finding the inner meaning, and without being influenced by the fact that they are cast in a form which is strange to us. This caution is especially needful in the case of Hindu books, because the Indian is fond of expressing himself in a form totally different from that of his Western brother.

In 1886 I made a few references in these pages to the *Mundaka Upanishad*, which is often known as the one which shaves off error so that the truth may shine or be apparent, and shall now proceed a little further in the same direction. This Upanishad is divided into chapters or sections which are called “mundakas” and “khandas,” the last being the smaller divisions included in the former: a “khanda” would therefore be something like our “section.”

Thus we have:

FIRST MUNDAKA, SECOND KHANDA

1. This is the truth: the sacrificial works which they saw in the hymns of the Veda have been performed in many ways in the Treta age. Practise them diligently, ye lovers of truth; this is your path that leads to the world of good works.

From the first verse to the end of the sixth there are statements and descriptions relating to the flames from the sacrifice and about the effects of good works, ending with these words:

“This is thy holy Brahma world—swarga—gained by thy good works.”

All of these mean to inculcate that *swarga* or heaven will be gained by good works, which are here also called sacrifices or the attentive following of the Brahmanical law. Both in the fifth and sixth verses heaven or devachan is referred to, in the one as the place “where the one lord of the devas dwells,” and in the other as “swarga.” Indra is “the one lord of the devas,” and his place, known as “Indra loka,” is devachan or the land of the gods.

Indra’s heaven is not eternal. The only loka admitted by the Hindu sacred books to be nondestructible is “Goloka” or the place of Krishna. Those who go to devachan have to emerge from that state when the energies that took them there are exhausted. In the Bagavad-Gita this is thus put: “When the reward is exhausted after having dwelt in

the heaven of Indra for years of infinite number, they return to the world of mortals.” But even if one should become Indra himself, who is the regent of this sphere, the reward would not be eternal, for the reason that Indra as a power comes to an end at the close of the manvantara. The Khanda under consideration touches upon the transitory nature of the reward for good works without knowledge in the seventh and other verses:

7. But frail indeed are these boats, the sacrifices, the eighteen, in which this lower ceremonial has been told. Fools who praise this as the highest good are subject again and again to old age and death.

8. Fools dwell in darkness, wise in their own conceit and puffed up with a vain knowledge, go round and round, staggering to and fro, like blind men led by the blind.

9. Children when they have long lived in ignorance consider themselves happy. Because those who depend on their good works are improvident, owing to their passions, they fall and become miserable when their life in the world which they have gained by their good works is finished.

The fall spoken of in these and also in the tenth is the death in devachan and rebirth into this life. Both life here and life in devachan are illusionary, and hence there is a continual rise and fall, fall and rise, from the one to the other until the time arrives when the man, by adding knowledge to good works, is able to mount above the illusion and prevent himself from being drawn into the gulf of death in either this world or the world of the devas. It must follow from this that such a perfected man may, while living among men, have the experiences of devachan, if that be his wish; in Buddha’s life it is said that he entered nirvana and carried on his mission upon earth afterwards.

Verse II, referring to those hermits called Sannyasis who have left all concerns of this world behind, has this significant sentence:

(those) depart free from passion, through the sun, to where that immortal person dwells whose nature is imperishable.

I am very much inclined to read this as meaning that even in their case what might be called absolute immortality is not gained.

The Hindu philosophy is full of fine distinctions, and, indeed, so is

occultism. To say that “they go to that place where the highest person dwells” is not the same as saying they become that person himself. In the Bagavad-Gita Krishna says that only a certain sort of devotion causes the devotee to become the highest person, or, to put it in other words, to be absorbed in the highest. In the present case the Sannyasi goes to the place but does not become that highest person. And in saying “absolute immortality” I have in view the immense periods of time covered by the cycles of the Hindus, which are so long that they seem the same as eternity to us, and are often construed to have that meaning, giving to the term a shorter or lesser significance than we give it. This can be noticed in the sentence quoted from the Bagavad Gita in the use of the word “infinite,” as there it does not mean never-ending, but only an enormous period of time, so immense that the human mind is not able to conceive it and therefore has to call it eternal. The “departure through the sun” is a reference to that part of the hidden-teachings of the Hindu initiates which deals with the practical part of yoga, the ways and means for developing the higher powers and faculties, all of which are governed and affected by certain forces and centres of force in the system of which this globe is a part. Even this has its counterpart in the Bagavad Gita in that chapter where it is said that the devotee who dies when the sun is in its northern course goes away never to return, and that the one who dies when the moon is waxing goes but to return again, ending with the statement that these two ways of white and black are eternally decreed in this world. This has been commented on by Europeans as being nonsense, but when we know that reference is meant to be made to the eternal unity of the great tides in human affairs and the adjustment of all things to universal laws, it does not seem so foolish. Of course if it be taken to apply to all men indiscriminately, then it would be the talk of children; but it is well known to all those who have had a glimmer of the inner meaning of these holy books that the persons who come under the influence of this law in the manner above given are only those devotees who follow the practices enjoined and thus bring into operation upon themselves different forces from those that bear upon the ordinary man.

In the next verse directions are given for finding the truth as:

12. Let a Brahmana⁴ after he has examined all these worlds which are gained by works acquire freedom from all desires. Nothing that is eternal (or not made) can be gained by that which is not eternal (or made). Let him in order to understand this take fuel in his hands and approach a guru who is learned and dwells entirely in Brahman, . . . and that teacher tells the truth to him.

Verse 13 ends this khanda leading to the second Mundaka wherein the truth about these matters is to be found.

Path, May, July, 1886, March, 1891

⁴ “A Brahmana” here does not exclude non-brahmans, but means the man who is on Brahma’s path, who is studying the wisdom of or about Brahma or spirit.

TWO LOST KEYS

THE BHAGAVAD-GITA—THE ZODIAC

IT has never been admitted by orientalists that there existed a key to the *Bhagavad-Gita*, other than a knowledge of the Sanskrit language in which it is written. Hence our European translators of the poem have given but its philosophical aspect.

But it is believed by many students of theosophy—among them such an authority as H. P. Blavatsky—that there are several keys to the noble poem, and that they have been for the time lost to the world. There has been no loss of them in the absolute sense, since they are preserved intact in many rolls and books made of polished stones hidden and guarded in certain underground temples in the East, the location of which would not be divulged by those who know. No search has been made by the profane for these wonderful books, because there is no belief in their existence; and for the sincere student who can project his mental sight in the right direction, there is no need for such discovery of the mere outward form in which those keys are kept.

There is also a key for the Zodiac. The modern astrologers and astronomers have lifted up their puny voices to declare regarding the probable origin of the Zodiac, giving a very commonplace explanation, and some going so far as to speak of the supposed author of it, not that they have named him or given him a distinct place in history, but only referred to the unknown *individual*. It is very much to be doubted if these modern star-gazers would have been able to construct anything whatever in the way of a Zodiac, had they not had this immemorial arrangement of signs ready to hand.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* and the Zodiac, while differing so much from each other in that the one is a book and the other the sun's path in the heavens, are two great storehouses of knowledge which may be construed after the same method. It is very true that the former is now in book shape, but that is only because the necessities of study under conditions which have prevailed for some thousands of years require it, but it exists in the ideal world imbedded in the evolutionary history of the human race. Were all copies of it destroyed tomorrow, the materials for their reconstruction are near at hand and could be regathered by those sages who know the realities underlying all appearances. And in the same way the Zodiac could be made over again by the same sages—not, however, by our modern astronomers. The latter no doubt would be able to construct a path of the sun with certain classifications of stars thereon, but it would not be the Zodiac; it would bear but little relation to the great cosmic and microcosmic periods and events which that path really has. They would not apply it as it is found used in old and new almanacs to the individual human being, for they do not know that it can in any way be so connected, since their system hardly admits any actual sympathy between man and the Zodiac, not yet having come to know that man is himself a zodiacal highway through which his own particular sun makes a circuit.

Considering how laughable in the eyes of the highly-educated scientific person of today the singular figures and arrangement of the Zodiac are, it is strange that they have not long ago abolished it all. But they seem unable to do so. For some mysterious reason the almanacs still contain the old signs, and the moon's periods continue to be referred to these ancient figures. Indeed, modern astronomers still use the old symbology, and give to each new asteroid a symbol precisely in line with the ancient zodiacal marks so familiar to us. They could not abolish them, were the effort to be made.

The student of the *Bhagavad-Gita* soon begins to feel that there is somewhere a key to the poem, something that will open up clearly the vague thoughts of greater meanings which constantly rise in his mind. After a while he is able to see that in a philosophical and devotional sense the verses are full of meaning, but under it all there

runs a deep suggestiveness of some other and grander sweep for its words. This is what the lost key will reveal.

But who has that key or where it is hidden is not yet revealed, for it is said by those who know the Brotherhood that man is not yet in the mass ready for the full explanation to be put into his hands. For the present it is enough for the student to study the path to devotion, which, when found, will lead to that belonging to knowledge.

And so of the Zodiac. As our acquaintance, through devotion and endeavor, with the journey of our own sun through our own human zodiac grows better, we will learn the meaning of the great pilgrimage of the earthly luminary. For it is impossible in this study to learn a little of ourselves without knowing more of the great system of which we are a copy.

For Atman is the sun,

The moon also it is;

And the whole collection of stars

Is contained within it.

WILLIAM BREHON, F.T.S.

Path, August, 1890

A COMMENTARY ON THE GAYATRI

Unveil, O Thou who givest sustenance to the Universe, from whom all proceed, to whom all must return, that face of the True Sun now hidden by a vase of golden light, that we may see the truth and do our whole duty on our journey to thy sacred seat.

—*The Gayatri*

I HAVE adopted a translation as above, which is excellent in its giving of the meaning of this verse. What is the Gayatri? It is the sacred verse of the Hindus and begins with Om, their sacred word and letter. Its first words are: *Om, Bhur, Bhurvah* !

The first word contains in it a declaration of the three periods of a Manvantara and the three powers of that great Being who alone Is. Of a manvantara it is the beginning, the middle, and the end, and the three powers are Creation (or manifesting), Preservation (or carrying on), and Destruction. The three first words, Om, bhur, bhurvah, draw attention to and designate the three worlds. The whole verse is an aspiration in the highest sense. Every Brahman at his initiation is further instructed in this verse, but from giving that I am necessarily excused, as I cannot give it in a way in which I have not received it.

Unveil is the cry of the man who is determined to know the truth and who perceives that something hides it from him. It is hidden by his own Karmic effects, which have put him now where the brain and the desires are too strong for the higher self to pierce through so long as he remains careless and ignorant. The cry is not made to some man-made god with parts, passions, and attributes, but to the Self above who seeth in secret and bringeth out to light. It is directed

to that on which the Universe is built and standeth,—no other than the Self which is in every man and which sitteth like a bird in a tree watching while another eats the fruit.

From this the whole Universe proceeds out into manifestation. The ancients held that all things whatsoever existed in fact solely in the idea, and therefore the practitioner of Yoga was taught—and soon discovered—that sun, moon, and stars were in himself, and until he learned this he could not proceed. This doctrine is very old, but today is adopted by many modern reasoners. For they perceive on reflection that no object enters the eye, and that whether we perceive through sight or feeling or any other sense whatever all objects are existing solely in idea. Of old this was demonstrated in two ways. First, by showing the disciple the actual interpenetration of one world by another. As that while we live here among those things called objective by us, other beings were likewise living in and among us and our objects and therein actually carrying on their avocations, perceiving the objects on their plane as objective, and wholly untouched by and insensible to us and the objects we think so material. This is no less true today than it was then. And if it were not true, modern hypnotism, clairvoyance, or clairaudience would be impossible. This was shown by a second method precisely similar to mesmeric and hypnotic experiments, only that to these was added the power to make the subject step aside from himself and with a dual consciousness note his own condition. For if a barrier of wood were erected in the sight of the subject which he clearly perceived and knew was wood, impervious to sight and an obstacle to movement, yet when hypnotised he saw it not, yet could perceive all objects behind it which were hidden in his normal state, and when he pressed against it thinking it to be empty air and feeling naught but force, he could not pass but wondered why the empty air restrained his body. This is modern and ancient. Clearly it demonstrates the illusionary nature of objectivity. The objectivity is only real relatively, for the mind sees no objects whatever but only their idea, and at present is conditioned through its own evolution until it shall have developed other powers and qualities.

The request made in the verse to *unveil the face of the True Sun* is that the Higher Self may shine down into us and do its work of

illumination. This also spreads forth a natural fact unknown to moderns, which is that the sun we see is not the true sun, and signifies too that the light of intellect is not the true sun of our moral being. Our forefathers in the dim past knew how to draw forth through the visible Sun the forces from the True one. We have temporarily forgotten this because our evolution and descent into the hell of matter, in order to save the whole, have interposed a screen. They say in Christian lands that Jesus went into hell for three days. This is correct, but not peculiar to Jesus. Humanity is doing this for three days, which is merely the mystical way of saying that we must descend into matter for three periods so immense in time that the logarithm of one day is given to each period. Logarithms were not first known to Napier, but were taught in the pure form of the mysteries, because alone by their use could certain vast calculations be made.

Which is now hidden by a vase of Golden Light. That is, the light of the True Sun—the Higher Self—is hidden by the blood contained in the vase of the mortal body. The blood has two aspects—not here detailed—in one of which it is a helper to perception, in the other a hindrance. But it signifies here the passions and desires, *Kama*, the personal self, the thirst for life. It is this that veils from us the true light. So long as desire and the personality remain strong, just so long will the light be blurred, so long will we mistake words for knowledge and knowledge for the thing we wish to know and to realize.

The object of this prayer is that we may carry out our whole duty, after becoming acquainted with the truth, while we are on our *journey to thy Sacred Seat*. This is our pilgrimage, not of one, not selfishly, not alone, but the whole of humanity. For the sacred seat is not the Brahmanical heaven of Indra, nor the Christian selfish heaven acquired without merit while the meritorious suffer the pains of hell. It is that place where all meet, where alone all are one. It is when and where the three great sounds of the first word of the prayer merge into one soundless sound. This is the only proper prayer, the sole saving aspiration.

AN OBSCURE BRAHMAN

THEOSOPHICAL SYMBOLISM

THE number 7 has, ever since the Theosophical Society was founded November 17th, 1875, played a prominent part in all its affairs, and, as usual, the symbols which particularly relate or pertain to the Society are in number, seven. They are: first the seal of the Society; second, the serpent biting his tail; third, the gnostic cross near the serpent's head; fourth, the interlaced triangles; fifth, the cruxansata in the centre; sixth, the pin of the Society, composed of a cruxansata entwined by a serpent, forming together T.S.; and seventh, OM the sacred Vedic word.

The seal of the Society contains all of the symbols enumerated, excepting *aum*, and is the synthesis of them. It, in fact, expresses what the Society is itself, and contains, or ought to, in symbolic form, the doctrines which many of its members adhere to.

A symbol to be properly so called, must be contained in the idea or ideas which it is intended to represent. As a symbol of a house could never be the prow of a boat, or the wing of a bird, but must be contained somewhere in the form of the house itself; that is, it must be an actual part chosen to represent or stand for the whole. It need not be the whole, but may be a lower form or species used as the representative of a higher of the same kind. The word is derived from the Greek words meaning *to throw with*, that is to throw together. To be a just and correct symbol, it should be such as that the moment it is seen by one versed in symbolism, its meaning and application become easily apparent. The Egyptians adopted to represent the soul passing back to its source, after the trial in the Hall of Two Truths, a winged globe, for a globe is a symbol of either the Supreme Soul or a

portion of it, and the wings were added to represent its life and flight to the upper spheres. In another branch of their symbology they represented justice by a scale which gives a just balance; while even there in the Hall of Two Truths, they reverted again to the other mode and symbolized the man being weighed by justice, in the form of his heart over against the feather of truth in the opposite pan of the scales.

There is one very curious hieroglyph of the Egyptians which deserves some study by those of curious mind. Here we will merely point it out, remarking that there is a mine of great value in the Egyptian method of picturing their ideas of the macrocosm. In one of the numerous papyri now in the British Museum, there is a picture of a globe being held up by a beetle by means of his head and two fore legs, while he is standing upon a sort of pedestal which has certain divisions, looking on the whole, like a section of an hour glass crossed by horizontal lines that project from each side. This pedestal represents stability; but what does the whole mean or shadow forth? Those who can follow up suggestions should direct their thoughts to the relation which the Sun bears to the earth in its orbital revolution.

To proceed with our analysis: The second symbol is, the serpent biting his tail. This is wisdom, and eternity. It is eternity, because that has neither beginning nor end and therefore the ring is formed by the serpent swallowing his tail. There is an old hermetic symbol similar to this, in which the circle is formed by two serpents interlaced and each swallowing the tail of the other one. No doubt the symbolism in that is, in respect to the duality of the manifested All, and hence, two serpents inextricably entwined.

Furthermore, the scales of the reptiles form the figures of facettes or diamonds, which shadow forth the illimitable diversity of the aspects of wisdom or truth. This is not due to any want of coherence or congruity in truth itself, but solely to the diverse views which each individual takes of the one Truth. These reflecting facettes are the beings composing the macrocosm: each one has developed himself only to a certain degree, and therefore can only appreciate and reflect that amount of wisdom which has fallen to his lot. As he passes again and again through the form of man, he slowly develops other various

powers of appreciating more truth, and so at the last may become one with the whole—the perfect man, able to know and to feel completely his union with all. This is when he has acquired the highest Yoga. So in our experience and in history and ethnology we find individuals, nations and races, whose want of responsiveness to certain ideas, and others whose power to grasp them, can only be explained by the doctrines of Reincarnation and Karma. If those doctrines are not accepted, there is no escape from a blank negation.

It is not necessary to express the duality of the Supreme Soul by two serpents, because in the third component part of the Seal, elsewhere, that is symbolized by the interlaced triangles. One of these is white, that one with the point uppermost, and the other is black with its apex directed downward. They are intertwined because the dual nature of the Supreme, while in manifestation, is not separate in its parts. Each atom of matter, so called, has also its atom of spirit. This is what the *Bagavad-Gita*¹ denominates Purusha and Prakriti, and Krishna there says that he is at once Purusha and Prakriti, he is alike the very best and the very worst of men. These triangles also mean, “the manifested universe.” It is one of the oldest and most beautiful of symbols, and can be discovered among all nations, not only those now inhabiting the earth, but also in the monuments, carvings and other remains of the great races who have left us the gigantic structures now silent as far as the voice of man is concerned, but resounding with speech for those who care to listen. They seem to be full of ideas turned into stone.

The triangles thus combined form in the interior space, a six sided plane figure. This is the manifested world. Six is the number of the world, and 666 is the great mystery which is related to the symbol. St. John talks of this number. Around the six sided centre are the six triangles projecting into the spiritual world, and touching the enclosed serpent of wisdom. In an old book, this is made by the great head of the Lord rising above the horizon of the ocean of matter, with the arms just raised so that they make the upper half of the triangle. This

¹ *Bagavad-Gita*, ch. 13; id. ch. 10

is the “long face,” or macrosopos, as it is called. As it rises slowly and majestically, the placid water below reflects it in reverse, and thus makes the whole double triangle. The lower one is dark and forbidding in its aspect, but at the same time the upper part of the darker one is itself light, for it is formed by the majestic head of this Adam Kadmon. Thus they shade into one another. And this is a perfect symbolism, for it clearly figures the way in which day shades into night, and evil into good. In ourselves we find both, or as the Christian St. Paul says, the natural and spiritual man are always together warring against each other, so that what we would do we cannot, and what we desire not to be guilty of, the darker half of man compels us to do. But ink and paper fails us in the task of trying to elucidate this great symbol. Go to Hermes, to St. John, the Caballah, the Hindu books, wherever you please, and there will you find the seven times seven meanings of the interlaced triangles.

OM is the Sacred Vedic syllable: let us repeat it with a thought directed to its true meaning.²

Within the small circle, placed upon the serpent, is a cross with its ends turned back. This is called the Gnostic Cross. It signifies evolution, among other ideas, for the turning back of its ends is caused by the revolving of the two diameters of the circle. The vertical diameter is the spirit moving down and bisecting the horizontal. This completed, the revolution round the great circle commences, and that motion is represented in the symbol by the ends turned back. In Chapter III of *Bagavad-Gita* Krishna says: “He who in this life does not cause this cycle, thus already revolved, to continue revolving lives to no purpose, a life of sin, indulging his senses.” That is, we must assist the great wheel of evolution and not oppose it; we must try to help in the great work of returning to the source from whence we came, and constantly endeavor to convert lower nature into higher, not only that of ourselves, but also of our fellow men and of the whole animated world.

This cross is also the symbol of the Hindu Chakra, or discus, of

² PATH No. I, p. 24.

Vishnu. In the Mahabharata is described the conflict between the Asuras and Devas, for the possession of the vase of Amreeta which had been churned with infinite trouble, from the ocean, and which the Asuras desired to take for themselves. The conflict began when *Rahu*, An Asura, assuming the form of a Deva, began drinking the ambrosia. In this case the Amreeta was spiritual wisdom, material existence, immortality, and also magic power. The deceit of *Rahu* was discovered before he had swallowed, and then the battle began.

In the midst of this dreadful hurry and confusion of the fight, *Nar* and *Narayan* entered the field together. *Narayan* beholding a celestial bow in the hands of *Nar*; it reminded him of his Chakra, the destroyer of the Asuras. The faithful weapon, ready at the mind's call, flew down from heaven and with direct and refulgent speed, beautiful, yet terrible to behold. And being arrived, glowing like the sacrificial flame, and spreading terror around, *Narayan* with his right arm formed like the elephantine trunk, hurled forth the ponderous orb, the speedy messenger and glorious ruin of hostile towns, who, raging like the final all destroying fire, shot bounding with desolating force, killing thousands of the Asuras in his rapid flight, burning and involving, like the lambent flame, and cutting down all that would oppose him. Anon he climbeth the heavens from whence he came. (Mahabharata, Book I, Ch. 15.)

Ezekiel, of the Jews, saw this wheel, when he was among the captives by the river Chebar in Chaldea. In a vision he saw the four beasts and the man of the Apocalypse, and with them "for each of the four faces," was a wheel, of the colour of a beryl; it was "as a wheel within a wheel," and they went wherever the living creatures went, "for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels." All of this appeared terrible to him, for he says: "And when they went I heard a noise like the noise of great waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a noise of tumult like the noise of a host."

There are many other meanings concealed in this symbol, as in all the others.

In the center of the interlaced triangles is placed the *Crux-ansata*. This is also extremely ancient. In the old Egyptian papyri it is frequently found. It signifies life. As Isis stands before the candidate, or the soul, upon his entry, she holds in one hand this cross, while he holds up his hand that he may not look upon her face. In another there is a winged

figure, whose wings are attached to the arms, and in each hand is held the same cross. Among other things we find here the horizontal and vertical diameters once more, but conjoined with the circle placed on top. This is the same as the old astrological sign for Venus. But in the seal, its chief and most important meaning is *the regenerated man*. Here in the centre, after passing the different degrees and cycles, both spirit and matter are united in the intelligent regenerated man, who stands in the middle knowing all things in the manifested universe. He has triumphed over death and holds the cross of life.

The last theosophical symbol is the pin of the Society, adopted early in its history but not used much. It is the cross we have just been considering, entwined in such a way by a serpent, that the combination makes T S as a monogram.

The foregoing is not exhaustive. Every symbol should have seven meanings of principal value, and out of every one of those we have been considering can be drawn that number of significations. Intelligent study of them will be beneficial, for when a consistent symbol, embodying many ideas is found and meditated upon, the thought or view of the symbol brings up each idea at once before the mind.

NILAKANT

Path, May, 1886

THEOSOPHICAL SYMBOLS

THE first article printed in the *PATH* on this subject was “Theosophical Symbolism” in Vol. 1, May, 1886.

The symbols of the Society are contained in its seal, which may be described first. It consists of a serpent formed into a circle and biting or swallowing its tail. Placed within this circle are two interlaced triangles that make what is called the “Seal of Solomon,” one of the triangles pointing apex up and the other apex down. That one which points up is white in color or any shade that is equivalent to that when compared with the other triangle, which is dark, as it should always be so represented. On the serpent and near its head so as to be in the centre line of the circle is a small circle within which is inscribed the Swastica, a simple cross with its four ends turned backward. Inside the central space enclosed by the two interlaced triangles is placed the famous cross of the Egyptians called *ansata*, and which is many times older than the Christian symbol. It is a cross without a top arm, which is replaced by an oval the narrow end of which rests on the top of the cross, thus forming its top arm. It should be of a white color. Around the whole is written the motto of the Society, reading “There is no religion higher than Truth,” the family motto of the Maharajahs, or great kings, of Benares, the sacred city of India. Sometimes over the top of the seal is written “OM,” the sacred word of the Hindus and the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet.



It will be of interest to all members of the Society to know that, although some people have claimed to be the inventors of this seal as

just described and that they made it for the Society in its initial stages in 1875, Madame Blavatsky long before then and before these claimants heard of Theosophy used substantially the same thing on her private note paper, some samples of which are in my desk, as also the original block from which she had her paper printed. Her seal had the coronet of countess over the top, and her monogram in the middle in place of the Egyptian cross. Some years after the adoption of the seal by the Society a person by the name of Bothell of Bath, England, made a hybrid imitation of it by splitting the serpent into three as if to show that evolution had divided itself up into heterogeneous elements, and he was then imitated by a person in America who sold amulets and love philters, meanwhile cribbing wholesale from all the Theosophical books and periodicals in order to make a saleable book on the darkness of Egypt. These childish imitations sufficiently expose themselves to anyone who knows something of symbology.

Our seal points the mind to the regenerated man who, symbolized by the cross, stands in the centre enclosed by the light and the dark triangle, and encircled by the great serpent or dragon of evolution and matter. But an analysis of the different parts of the whole will aid us in understanding and grasping all its meanings. For in symbology the symbol is only right when it fitly represents all the ideas meant to be conveyed, and in all its parts is consistent with the whole, as well as being also in conformity to tradition and the rules of the ancients. It should also when understood be of such a character that when it is looked at or thought of, with the image of it in the mind, all the ideas and doctrines it represents recur to the thinker. This is why confused symbols are useless and right ones of the greatest use. Indeed, the same rule holds with clairvoyance—a very different subject—for there the symbol which is the image of the person or thing desired to be seen clairvoyantly may confuse the seer, or the opposite, just as it is or is not consistent. Symbols are also valuable for the older reason that, while the books, the writings, and the other works of men fade away and are no more for subsequent ages, the great symbols do not disappear. Our Zodiac is one mass of these, and though its age is a mystery it still lingers in our almanacs and figures in the sacred books

or monuments of all times and peoples. And even today the most materialistic of our people are wondering if it may not be possible to communicate with the inhabitants of other planets by the use of symbols, in some such way as the savage may be dealt with by the use of sign language.

Let us take the serpent which forms the great circle of the seal.

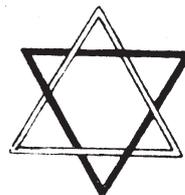


Swallowing its tail, it shows the cycle of eternity or the great spiral of evolution or the Manvantara. This is the circle of necessity of the Egyptians, the path of the numerous reincarnations of the Soul. Merely even as serpent it signifies this, for the serpent casts its skin periodically just as man does at every death of his many bodies. It also signifies wisdom, as the Serpent has been called the wise, and, as shown in the *Secret Doctrine*,

the word also meant the Masters of wisdom and power. Its tail running into its mouth means perpetual turning of the circle, or the periodical coming forth and disappearing of the manifested Universe. Nearly every bible has this. Saint John speaks of the great dragon who swept with his tail one-third of the stars to the earth. That is, that in the course of this great evolution the serpent we are considering brought egos from the stars down to this globe, or up to it if you prefer and think it any better than the others in the sky. In the form of a circle it symbolizes perfection, as that is the most perfect figure, which, too, in its different relations shows us the great doctrine that the Universe was built by number, weight, and number, and is controlled or presided over by harmony now disturbed and now restored.

For, although the proportion of the diameter of the circle is as one to three, there is a remainder, when we are exact, of figures that cannot be written because we never should get to the end of them. This is the unknown quantity continually entering into the succession of events and ever tending to restore the harmony.

The two interlaced triangles come next in importance. This is the “Seal of Solomon,” so called because it was popularly supposed he used it when dealing with the genii that did his bidding. Among the Moors is a tale of how he confined one of the spirits in the Red Sea in a pot, on the top of which this seal was inscribed. But this is hardly the origin of it. On a very ancient Indian coin in my possession may be seen the same seal

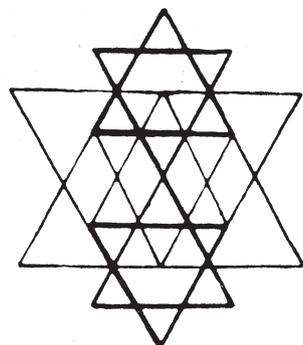


surrounded by rays of the sun, and the figure was known in the early ages in Hindustan. A couple of Brahmin friends of the writer state that it has always been known in that caste. In *his Unveiled*, page 266, H.P. Blavatsky has a very good exposition of it, accompanied with two diagrams illustrating its Hindu and Jewish forms. These triangles also symbolize the sevenfold constitution of man and all things. They have six points and six triangles enclosing a central space which is the seventh division of them and here represents the seventh principle or more properly the thinker, standing in the universe and touching all things from the six sides by means of the six triangles. The points of these touch the sides of the serpent or the great encircling wheel of evolution in and by which the thinker gains experience from nature. The white triangle—called the upper—refers to spirit, and the lower, or dark one, to matter; interlaced they signify, as said in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, that spirit and matter are co-eternal and ever conjoined. Thus they also represent the great opposites in nature and mind of good and evil, night and day, male and female, liberty and slavery, cold and heat, those great contrasts by means of which we are able at last to find the truth. In the *Kaballah* this figure is thought much of. Thus it is said that its representation in this world is a reflection or reverse of the real triangle in the upper worlds. But this statement does not convey much, because, if one tries the experiment of reversing the image on paper, it will be found that then our figure would have the black triangle uppermost, and in mystical writings that means the reign of black magic. Probably that is what the Cabalists meant, as they delight in calling this the dark world or hell.

The thirty-third degree of Freemasonry may also be obtained from this figure. That degree is the Consistory or Council, emblematically the great body of the Sages or Governors, the collection or sum of all the others. The idea now illustrated may be new to Freemasons, but is nevertheless correct. Revolve the figure downwards so as to produce a reverse image, and we get two; as the *Ka- v ball ah* of the Jews has it, one the image of the other. Next take the two slanting sides, being the

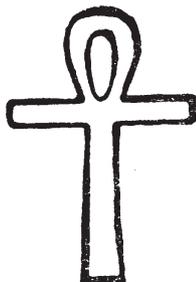


prolongation of the two downward-pointing sides of the upper dark triangle, and make a reflection upon them as base on each side. The result will be the figure here shown, in which three smaller "Solomon's seals" are contained within a greater one. If now the chambers or divisions in this new figure are counted, they will be found to number thirty-two, and by adding the figure as a whole we get thirty-three or the Consistory, which may be placed in the point in the centre of



all. This may seem to be fanciful to some, but it is no more so than much else in Masonry. It has the advantage, however, of being correct, even if curious. This number of divisions or chambers, with the whole figure, also gives the number of the thirty-three crores of gods or forces of nature in the ancient Hindu Pantheon.

No less ancient and interesting than the triangles is the Egyptian cross placed in the very centre of the seal within the six-sided chamber made by the interlaced triangles. This should be a glittering white in color, as it represents the regenerated man as well as life. The top oval is matter, and the lower arms spirit, which joined to matter is life both material and eternal. It is also the sign of Venus. And Venus is the elder sister of the earth according



to the *Secret Doctrine*. On Venus are felt our changes, and those proceeding on her affect us. This cross is found in nearly every Egyptian papyrus. The *Book of Job* is really a translation, somewhat altered, of the *Book of the Dead* used by the Egyptians. In this the soul—or the candidate—enters the Hall of Two Truths to be judged before Osiris. He is Job. Entering he stands before Isis, who is a maid and says, "I made a covenant with mine eyes that I should not look upon a maid." She holds in her hand the symbol given in the illustration, signifying life. It was placed in the hands of the guardians of the dead and in many different other places. In the British Museum in the papyri, and on monuments in Egypt or those in Europe and America, it is to be constantly found. On the obelisk brought from Egypt by Commander Gorringer and now set up in Central Park, New York City, a count shows more than thirty repetitions of this symbol. Examining a mummy-case that by some chance was exhibited in Tacoma, Washington, last year, I saw many of these painted on the case. It is one of the most ancient of all the symbols.



The bent cross in the little circle placed on the serpent at the top of the seal joined to the apex of the upper triangle is the Swastika. It is found almost everywhere in the East, as well as among the earlier Christians and elsewhere in Europe. Many meanings have been given to this; sometimes it represents the whirling of the will, and again the "Wheel of the Law" mentioned in both Buddhistic and Brahmanical books. The Buddhas are said to give the Wheel of the Law another turn when they come, and Krishna tells Arjuna that he who does not keep properly revolving the great wheel of action and reaction between the two worlds lives a life of sin without purpose. In India Swastika represents the spot or center in which the forces from the great unknown pour to show themselves subsequently in various manifestations; and also it stands as a representation of the great mill of the Gods, in the center of which the soul sits, and where all things are drawn in by the turning of the axle to be crushed, amalgamated, and transformed again and again.

This ends an analysis of the seal of the Society. In 1875 the writer of this at request of Col. Olcott drew a design for a pin for the use of members which was then made first by a Maiden Lane jeweler. It is formed by combining the serpent with the Egyptian tau so as to make "T.S." The illustration shows it taken from a cut made from the old design last year, when the pins began to be used more than previously. They are now worn by a good many members in both America and Europe. Col. Olcott has one that was presented to him just before last London convention by a New York Theosophist.



The Sanskrit "Aum" at the top of the seal and the motto are later additions, adopted after Madame Blavatsky and Col. Olcott went to India. The Aum in its present position is to be read as the "Fountain of Light, the Sun which illuminates our minds, and the goal of our endeavor"—that is, truth, for Theosophy constantly proves to us that "There is no religion higher than Truth."

WILLIAM Q. JUDGE