

The Universal Mystery-Language and Its Interpretation

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1 — INTRODUCTION

This series of articles deals with the interpretation of symbolism and mythology, and in introducing this subject it will be advisable to give a brief summary of those theosophical teachings most concerned therewith. And while it is not possible to expound and demonstrate these teachings within the necessary limits, the inquirer will find what they need in this respect in the theosophical literature which is so readily available.

Theosophy is the recent {1875} presentation of a body of doctrine known as the Secret Doctrine, the Wisdom-Religion, the Esoteric Tradition, etc., which has existed in all ages, and which constitutes the basis of all religious and philosophical systems. This knowledge concerns the deeper mysteries of humanity and the universe, and was communicated to the early human races of by their divine ancestors. It has been handed down throughout succeeding ages by those qualified to be its guardians, by whom it is still preserved at the present day.

There have been times in past history when this knowledge was commonly known; and other times, including the present, when it has been esoteric or hidden from public view. But in this latter case, the Wisdom-Religion is communicated to humanity by messengers, who are the founders of great religions or the teachers of great philosophies. Theosophy accords to the human race, and even to civilization, a far greater antiquity than is allowed by our timid scholars, not yet emancipated from the narrow purview to which theology has accustomed us. But when this prejudice has been overcome, it will be possible to give due value to the evidence of archaeology, which conflicts with the foregone theories of science, but supports the teachings of theosophy.

Humanity has been on earth for many millions of years, during which the earth has witnessed the rise and fall of countless races and cultures, succeeding each other like waves. It follows from this general plan of cyclic evolution that some of

the races of antiquity have been further advanced in knowledge and culture than we as yet are; we stand, towards such ancient races, in the same relation as a child stands to its parent; the child belongs to a more advanced stage of evolution, but the parent has attained greater maturity. Hence we, though at a more advanced stage in evolution can learn from our ancestry because they had reached greater maturity in their cycle than we have in ours.

The course of evolution is, broadly speaking, double: there is an evolution upwards from below, and an evolution downwards from above. The result of this twofold action is that humanity first descends from spirit into matter (involution), and then reascends from matter into spirit (evolution). The earliest races of humanity (represented by Adam in Eden) lived in the presence of God (so to speak); they were in a golden age of innocence. In subsequent races, the natural course of evolution led humanity to become less spiritual and more material (represented by the expulsion from Eden and the acquisition of "coats of skin"). The spiritual faculties became latent as the physical faculties developed. Humanity had no longer direct communication with the gods, and this communication was kept up indirectly by the means of divine instructors. The traditions of these divine instructors are preserved in allegorical form in the ancient mythologies, which tell of gods, god-men, heroes, the founders of cities and civilizations, the teachers of arts, agricultural or technical. In still later stages, the progress of materialization had so far supervened that even this means of communication was no longer open. In these ages knowledge was kept alive by the sending out periodically of messengers, from the Lodge of initiated adepts who preserve the sacred knowledge, to reawaken the light among humanity by founding schools of the Mysteries, which schools afterwards became the great religious systems which we find today, or great philosophical schools like those of Pythagoras and Plato.

Thus each human is essentially a god, having latent within them the germs of divine faculties, which are ready at

some time to germinate and fructify. And this germinating is effected by the action of other humans of more advanced evolution, who act as teachers and pass on the light which they themselves have received, kindling in their pupils and successors the latent spark of knowledge that is within all humans. This is the esoteric tradition in one sense of the term; light is handed down from person to person and from race to race; and history shows us that progress of all kinds is due to the inspiration imparted by individuals and by the movements which they start.

But for our present purpose there is one particular mode of preserving the esoteric tradition which most concerns us; and that is the method of symbolism and sacred allegory. Before H. P. Blavatsky wrote her great work *The Secret Doctrine* in 1888, various scholars had studied this subject and became convinced that there is a system of symbols common to all religions, diffused over the globe, identical in essence among the most widely scattered and diverse peoples; and that the mythologies of Greece, India, Egypt, Scandinavia, etc., have a common basis. But the works written by these scholars were few and sporadic, not generally known, and merely contributing to the rare exotics of literature. It was H. P. Blavatsky who put together these scattered fragments, wove them into a consistent whole, and gave them their real significance; for they are not mere items of curious lore, but facts of the most important character; and in our endeavor to interpret some of these myths and symbols we shall show their bearing upon an understanding of the mysteries of the life we all have to lead.

There are certain broad general truths which transcend the power of expression in ordinary verbal language; and this must necessarily be the case. For verbal language is the instrument of a certain portion of the mind which has limits; the knowledge of which we are speaking relates to powers of the mind which transcend those limits; and therefore they are beyond the power of words. Such profound ideas are expressed by symbols; the full meaning of these symbols has to be grasped intuitively by the exercise of higher faculties of the

mind; but we can approximate to such a comprehension by studying the various meanings which the symbol conveys, and holding all these meanings in the mind, until finally we gain some sense of the real underlying meaning.

It is these symbols which constitute the mystery-language; which thus becomes at once a means of preserving and conveying the knowledge, and a means of concealing it. For mysteries are revealed to those who have eyes to see, and doors are opened to those having the keys. The classical mythology is a much altered form of ancient mystery-teachings which were conveyed to the public in the guise of dramatic presentations. For the Mystery-Schools had outer and inner mysteries, the inner for candidates for initiation, the outer for the public; just as Jesus had private instructions for his disciples, but spoke to the multitude in parables. In the course of our interpretation of symbols, we shall give illustrations of the real meaning of these classical myths and of similar myths in other lands.

2 — THE CIRCLE

As was said in the INTRODUCTION, a symbol sums up in a single picture a meaning which can appear to the mind only as a number of separate meanings; it is beyond the power of the ordinary mind, but not beyond the power of human intelligence, to visualize the entire meaning at once; hence we must see it in a series of separate pictures, much as we might get an idea of the shape of a crystal by looking at its various aspects separately. The circle may be considered either as a line or as the area bounded thereby. Considered as a line it is infinite, so that it represents endless duration. It can be regarded either as a figure contained by one single line, or as a polygon with an infinite number of sides; which indicates that the *one* and the *many* are extremes which meet. The circle seems to enunciate the proverb, "Extremes meet." So it denotes cyclic motion; in virtue of which, continued movement from a point will bring us back to the same point again. So it stands for the repetition of cycles, the course of evolution, resurrection and rebirth, birth after death, death after birth. Of course, as we know, it can be elaborated into the spiral (helix), and this again into still more involved curves, so that we may thus obtain a complete picture, though not one so concise and radical.

The circle denotes unity, especially as compared with the line, triangle, and square. It cannot be divided into similar parts, or built up out of similar parts. The number *one* is at the same time the least and the greatest of numbers. It heads the series of odd numbers, and also the series of powers of *two*; so that it is neither male nor female in symbology. It is the first principle, number one, in any hierarchy; it is the First Cause. We see it again in the symbol of the sun, and the Sun itself is also a symbol; it is the radiating center of our solar system and is typical of other suns which the universe contains.

In the geometrical symbolism found at the beginning of *The Secret Doctrine*, the circle is the first figure. The very root of All cannot be represented by any figure at all, as it is bound-

less and formless, and the *tabula rasa* or clean slate is the best we can do in the way of representation. When on this we draw a circle we have the symbol of *space*, sometimes called the container of all, or better, the root of all, the common parent. For space is not emptiness, it is utter fullness; it is that from which all springs. Its characteristic is unity, and by virtue of its unity it is all-comprehending. A variant of the circle is the serpent, which is represented with its tail in its mouth, denoting the union of beginning and end, or rather the absence of beginning and end. But the serpent has other meanings, as will be seen later.

Motion, eternal ceaseless vibration, is said to be inherent in the nature of things; together with *infinite space* and *infinite duration*, it is a primary postulate which can neither be conceived nor excluded from the mind. This motion is essentially circular, therefore vibratory; or it is essentially vibratory, therefore circular. A pendulum with its motion unrestricted, vibrates in ellipses, which vary from the straight line to the circle, as extremes; a circular motion can be compounded of, or resolved into, two mutually perpendicular rectilinear motions. A pendulum whose bob describes a circle will throw on the wall a shadow which vibrates to and fro in harmonic motion. We thus see the connection between vibrations and circular motion; and this is shown in symbolism by the cross within the circle.

The great problem of squaring the circle means knowing how to accommodate life in the world of limitations with the limitless life at its root. The corresponding mathematical problem is also capable of solution, though it remains insoluble as long as the greater problem is unsolved.

The circle denotes space, which is not an empty container but the mother of all things. This aspect is also represented by the symbol of the egg, circular in form, productive in function. The egg is more exactly an ellipsoid, whose plane figure is an ellipse; a derivative of the circle, wherein duality begins to supervene over unity. In solid form the circle becomes the sphere, whose surface is a boundless plane. The circumference

of the circle stands for zero; it contains no parts, and is divided into one part when a point is taken in it. Thus we obtain the finite line, which is the symbol of the number 1.

What impresses one most in these theosophical studies is the marvelous unity of thought that prevails throughout. The theosophist does not (or should not) keep religion and science in separate compartments, each pining for the loss of its partner; one's deepest devotional feelings are illuminated by knowledge, and one's studies made sacred by one's understanding of their meaning. Heart and Head unite in one and are not at war. The meaning of these sacred symbols should enter deeply into our heart, and not be left as a barren and interesting pursuit. Our life here seems all ends and beginnings because our view is so contracted that we cannot discern the unity and wholeness. Here we are reminded of that Spiritual Sun, which, universal, has its focus in every human heart — we, the world in miniature, a solar system of planets in rhythmic motions attendant upon their Lord; and we may rise in thought to a forgetfulness of our petty limitations. Through such a symbol illumination may come, so that we may re-enter our humble world renewed and strengthened for the duties we perform. Know that thou art a sun, whose function is to illumine all, not to expect benefits. Thus we will rise to our true dignity, fearing neither god nor devil. We are deathless, infinite, in our essence; nor is the quality of that essence beyond our reach. At any moment of our life *I am* immortal, eternal; “End and Beginning are dreams!” (*The Song Celestial*, Sir Edwin Arnold, 1885, Book the Second.)

3 — THE CROSS

The sign of the cross has been very potent in Christianity, but rather as a glyph than a symbol; which means, according to the distinction made in *The Secret Doctrine* (1:66) a conventional sign, used to bring to mind the ideas which it stands for; whereas a symbol is not arbitrary or conventional, but sums up in its very form certain occult principles. It is the actual correspondence, among figures, of some universal law, too profound and inclusive to be conveyed in language. The cross is essentially two straight lines of equal length crossing one another at right angles, but has variants, each expressing some particular shade of meaning.

The initial stages of cosmogenesis or the birth of worlds are symbolized by certain simple geometric figures. We have already spoken of the circle, which by itself represents the primordial abyss of Chaos. Within this there appears a central point, the first germ of all that is to become manifest; it is like the germinal speck in an egg — Nature repeats everywhere the same original process, and the egg is a very pregnant emblem of cosmogenesis. This primordial point is the First Logos, or Word, and includes in itself both the positive and negative, or active and passive, sides of manifestation, which two have not yet become differentiated from each other. Thus it is sometimes called androgyne or double-sexed; but in using the words *male* and *female* in these connections, we must be careful not to give a physiological sense to them, as they have about as much to do with that as have the terms dextro- and laevo- in chemistry (right or clockwise and left or counter-clockwise), or positive and negative in physics.

The next stage in cosmogenesis is represented by the same circle with a horizontal diameter crossing it. This signifies a divine immaculate Mother Nature within the all-embracing infinitude. When the horizontal line is crossed by a vertical one, we have the symbol of Father Nature added, and the two together form the mundane cross and stand for the manifested

universe. This duality of Spirit and Matter, Force and Form, Energy and Inertia, etc., pervades the universe, not only in the planes of objectivity, but also subjectively, in our mind in our feelings; and on the highest plane of all these two intersecting lines may stand for the *divine thought* acting in the *divine mind*. It is impossible to give more than a sketchy and introductory explanation here of these pregnant symbols, but the reader may be referred to the opening pages of *The Secret Doctrine*, where these diagrams will be found, as well as to many other parts of that work.

The cross is found in a widespread trinity of symbols — Circle, Crescent, Cross, which denote Spirit, Mind, and Matter respectively. The three combine in the symbol of Mercury, denoting a person, with the crescent for their brain, the circle for their heart, and the cross for their organs — Head, Heart, and Hands, as we may say. Development in biology shows the extrusion of polar elements from the central nucleus, whether in the germ cell or in the seed which sends shoots up into the air and down into the earth. Various combinations of these three symbols make the symbols of planets, and we find them again on standards, as the star and crescent of Islam, the cross of Christianity, and the sun of Japan. The circle is the Sun, the crescent the Moon.

The most interesting meaning of the cross is its connection with crucifixion. It signifies the “Word made flesh,” the incarnation of Divinity. And so it stands for the Christ, the divine Self of every person, which is said to have been crucified on the cross of Matter, or to have taken up the cross — that is, worldly life — in order to *redeem* the animal nature of a human. Paul in his Epistles dwells much on the idea of the Christ being crucified in us. This is the real sacrifice; for the god is exiled thereby and has to undergo the tribulations of mortal incarnation; but the sacrifice is made in the spirit of Love, and a reluctant sacrifice is no sacrifice at all. The universal and ancient truth of the redemption of the flesh by the indwelling god has been turned theologically into a special atonement made by a special son of God at a particular place

and time; and the sacred allegory found in the Gospels has been taken to refer to an actual execution. But this idea loses force when we find that many other religions besides Christianity have the same story of a crucified Christ. Some confusion may be caused by the fact that Paul uses the word crucifixion sometimes to mean sacrificing: he speaks of crucifying the flesh, but here he is evidently using the word in a different sense from his use of it in speaking of Christ being crucified in us. The cross in Christianity has descended from a symbol into a mere glyph: its significance is lost, and it remains a reminder, a banner.

We spoke above of the need for avoiding a gross interpretation of symbolism, but this has actually often been done, and a word of comment is required. In degenerate times, there has always been a degradation of symbolism. The two lines of the cross represent the male and female creative potencies, which on the highest plane are the divine thought in the divine mind. But, owing to universal analogy, the same symbol may also illustrate the active and passive natural forces in physical organisms; and so we find cults for the deification of the procreative powers. These powers are innocent natural functions when confined to their proper use; but if deified, we get licentious cults, and in this way the cross may acquire a sinister meaning.

The cross has other forms besides the equal-armed or Greek cross; the form adopted in Christianity is sufficiently familiar, and has perhaps been chosen from confusion with the Roman method of execution. Sometimes the crossbar touches the top of the upright, forming the Tau. Each of these variants emphasizes some particular meaning, and it would require many articles to go fully into all. When six squares are arranged so that three are horizontal and four perpendicular, we get a figure like the Latin cross and representing the six faces of an opened-out cube. If a cross is inscribed in a circle, the segments of the lines are in geometrical proportion, and the ratio between the arms in various cases may suggest mathematical keys. An alternative to the Tau or the cross is the

Tree, found in *Genesis* as the Tree of Life, in the Norse Yggdrasil and the Indian Aśvattha Tree. It denotes material nature, and round it is often twined a serpent, denoting the life forces operating in cyclic path through the planes of Matter. When the arms of the Greek cross are bent at the ends, we get the Svastika, the bends being intended to convey the idea that the cross is rotating like a wheel. This indicates the eternal motion of the elements and shows how equilibrium is attained by maintaining a neutral center amid continual changes.

Thus we have touched the highlights in this profound subject, and may conclude with the hope that this will lead to further study.

4 — THE SERPENT

This symbol, like the others, condenses a number of meanings into one; and of these meanings we have already touched upon one in THE CIRCLE. It was there mentioned that the serpent is often shown swallowing its tail, as an emblem of the return of cycles upon themselves, and the union of ends and beginnings. It was also shown that, if the ends of the circle pass one another instead of meeting, a spiral curve is formed, which still further expresses the course of evolution. This spiral curve is often shown as a serpent, so that one meaning of this symbol is that of the spiral course of evolution.

It will be well to say here, with reference to the serpent, as also to many other symbols, that there is a *dual* meaning. A knowledge of this fact removes many obscurities in the interpretation of symbols; we have seen earlier, for instance, that the cross may represent the interaction of *cosmic mind* and *cosmic matter* on the highest plane, or the union of physical forces on the terrestrial plane. Similarly we hear of good or bad serpents, and in the Christian Bible we are told in one place to be wise as serpents, and in other places to beware of that old serpent the Devil. Bearing this dual nature in mind, we shall avoid such confusions as theology has made in confounding the Serpent in Genesis, who taught humanity wisdom, with that Devil who is the personification of humanity's evil passions.

We read in *The Secret Doctrine* that Fohat, *divine messenger*, intelligent cosmic electricity, who at the *divine Word* proceeds forth to create worlds and the beings thereon, moves in a *serpentine* course, generates spirals; and this spiral plan of evolution is imitated throughout Nature, from the nebulae to the spiral growth of plants. The serpent means divine wisdom, creative intelligence; and Masters of Wisdom are called serpents — which gives a new meaning to the injunction “Be ye wise as serpents.” (*Matthew* 10:16.) Hermes or Mercury carries the caduceus, a wand with two serpents entwined on a

staff; the Chinese made the serpent the emblem of their emperors; the Druids called themselves snakes; serpent-emblems called Dracontia once covered the globe and are still found; Quetzalcōātl was the snake-deity of the ancient Mexicans; dragons are found throughout ancient symbology with the same sense. But we also hear of evil serpents. The Gnostics spoke of an Agathodaímōn and a Kakodaímōn, or a good and an evil divinity, represented as serpents; Hercules slays Python; Apollo at birth overcomes a serpent, but does it by means of another serpent — the higher wisdom in humans overcoming the lower. The two nodes of the moon, Rāhu and Ketu, are called the Dragon's head and tail. So the serpent can represent the duality of human nature — which is but a copy of the duality in cosmos. A dual geometry may be based on the right and left helical curves. There is the serpent of spirit and the serpent of matter, the heavenly wisdom from above and the earthly wisdom from below, of which Paul speaks so often. These polar forces throughout all creation make the eternal contrast by which growth is promoted and equilibrium sustained. The lower serpent of matter is not evil in itself, but becomes evil to humans when they set themselves in a wrong relation to it. One's compound nature enables them to endow the forces of Nature with intelligence and thus to create bad serpents, which impede their progress, but in the long run give them the victor's strength; and cosmically speaking, the descent of spirit into matter has engendered fearsome creatures that prey on one another, and deadly poisons and pestilences. So the serpent or Devil may very well stand for the lower nature of a human, which (as we know) is a dire and dismal reality, a specter we have ourselves raised and must lay; and the Serpent may just as well stand for humanity's Savior, the divine wisdom from above. Only let us not personify them into a Jehovah and a Satan; and let us remember that our body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, even though we may have desecrated the shrine.

The serpent is closely associated with the tree — sometimes the cross — and, as said in THE CROSS, denotes the crea-

tive forces circling through the planes of matter. The children of Israel are bitten by serpents, which causes a pestilence, and are healed by Moses (a magician) setting up a brazen serpent. The Serpent is the teacher of humanity, as are the Christos, Prometheus, Lucifer, and the Savior under various other names. But he is also the Tempter — or rather, the one who tries and tests one. For how is humanity to exercise the divine prerogative of free will unless they is given a free choice? Therefore the Teacher is rightly called a Tempter, but not in a malign sense.

As regards Easter, it is appropriate to mention the serpent in connection with the egg. In various parts of the earth are found serpent mounds, often with a mound representing the egg near the mouth of the serpent. These two symbols are naturally associated; for the egg symbolizes the womb of Nature. Its form is spheroidal, so that it stands for the same as the circle; but it has a germ inside, from which will spring, in stage after stage of unfoldment, the complete being. For some people this may be a mere *analogy* — little more than one of the figures of rhetoric in the back of the grammar book. But analogy is the great key to the interpretation of cosmic and human mysteries. The ordinary hen's egg is actually a faithful miniature of the great Cosmic Egg, and it is possible to trace the most wonderful analogies throughout all the stages of the embryo which biologists study. The custom of exchanging eggs at the time of the year's rebirth was observed by many nations and has been adopted into Christianity along with other *pagan* customs.

5 — THE DANCE

It may be wondered how this subject comes under our general title, but we do not propose to limit ourselves to squares and triangles or symbols with a geometrical shape, but to use the word *symbol* in a wider sense. So the word *dance* can be used as a symbol, and those who want a classical name can use that of the Muse of Choric Song and Dance — Terpsichore. We shall doubtless say things which are being widely said, thought, and acted on today; but the theosophical key will be found a great aid in interpreting and justifying the inspirations and intuitions of those who might feel the need of definiteness and coordination in their aspirations.

The course of evolution runs in curves which bring racial cultures down into materialism and then up again towards a renewed knowledge of the essential values of life. So we may expect to find a reappearance of ancient institutions which have been lost or degraded. The language of symbolism, allegory, and mythology is a means of embalming these institutions, so that their seeds may remain encysted, as it were (it is often convenient to mix metaphors), thus remaining free from harm until they can be safely revived.

All antiquity shows the importance attached to the dance; it still prevails but in what guise? Apart from the noble efforts of the few alluded to above, it has become at best an amusement, too often with an intrusive element of sex appeal, more or less innocent; and as part of a dramatic scene, the ballet has more often made its appeal to our coarser than to our more refined tastes. We have to be careful not to transfer our own conceptions to the ancients and accuse them of mixing worship with frivolity because the dance with us has descended to frivolity *from* worship. One is all the more gratified to find that in some quarters at least a nobler conception of the dance is gaining ground; and it is to a wish to second those efforts that the choice of this particular subject for an article is mainly due.

Downward curves in evolution are marked by the misuse of humanity's divine powers, whereby is created *sin*, from which one strives to escape by holiness. One may become so depraved that asceticism seems their only salvation. A snuffling Puritanism feared even the dance on the village green, because for that it would no longer have been innocent. In the classical age not only the dance but every kind of athletic exercise was an essential part of religious celebration; they were performed in honor of the gods. Some peoples of today have the same in their tribal dances. It was a practical enactment of the universal principle of rhythm and harmony, the lacking keynote in modern life, whose watchword seems to be *excess* in all things. Who that has fine appreciations can deny that the lack of rhythm and proportion has vitiated our manners, tastes, and institutions? We are becoming aware of it and of the need for amending. For a while, no doubt, we shall carry even into our amendings the spirit of excess, of self-consciousness, of striving, of artificiality. Spontaneity cannot be won by chasing her with a net; she is coy and must be wooed. We can but make ourself worthy, and then we may be honored with a visit.

It would be wantonly unjust in this article to omit reference to the work of Katherine Tingley, whose mission was to strike anew so many lost keynotes. The importance of the dance, its real significance, was well known to her, and she introduced its practical enactment among the members of her company of students at Point Loma — chiefly among the children, whose unspoiled minds rendered them better material, but notably among people of all ages as part of her wonderful dramatic presentations in the Greek Theater. The influence thus started has spread widely. For not only has the influence spread by direct imitation, but also through the unseen communications which bind together our minds irrespective of distance.

All concerted movements, whether of the dance, the song, the orchestra, or even military drill, express the harmonious cooperation of many individuals in one whole; and all those in whom the spirit of life is not dormant or dead experi-

ence an indefinable joy therein. For once they have laid aside personality and are acting as part of a greater self. They have experienced the joys of a life larger than that of the self.

The word *symbolical* has come with some people to mean unreal, and it is with this feeling that they speak of ancient ritual dances as being symbolical of something or other. Others think that the participants in these rites were actually accomplishing a creative function. And may it not be our inner awareness of this fact that gave us the mysterious sense of joy? To theosophists, we are not poor hapless sinners dumped down in a cruel world by an absurd deity for the purpose of preparing ourselves by self-mortification for a better world somewhere else; nor are we a mere chance happening or by-product of some incredible cosmic process. We are a part of the Universe, a part of Nature, a part of *God*. Our smallest acts count. It may be hard to define our goal; it may not be best to try to define it. Let us call it self-realization. And if this is not to mean that each petty personality will make the vain attempt to realize a little life of one's own apart from others, then it must mean that we must seek to realize that greater life wherein we all share as equal components.

Let us get beyond the distinction of sanctimonious and sinful, sacred and secular; let us get back to the unity of life. The simplest natural functions have been and can be considered sacred, pure, joyous. The body (as H. P. Blavatsky points out) is the temple of the Holy Ghost, but that fane has been desecrated, so that we have turned from it with disgust and regard the body and its functions as something profane.

Those gods of the old Pantheons stand for departed glories of the human race; some went back to Olympus, and some with loving sacrifice departed not from humanity but suffered degradation with them that they might one day again raise humanity to the heights. No doubt Terpsichore, the Muse of Choric Song and Dance, has never been away from us.

There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

(The Merchant of Venice, William Shakespeare, Act V, Scene 1.)

There are some who have had glimpses — enough to make them homesick. But harmony cannot be achieved by perfecting oneself in the use of our own solitary instrument.

6 — THE SUN AND MOON

The meaning of *sun* can be gathered by considering the Sun of our solar system. It is the heart of that system, the center whence flows all the life and light. Earth and other planets attend it, like the retinue around the throne, and shine by reflected luster. There is a sun in the human body, generally called the heart, but rather the vital center controlling the heart than the actual muscular sac. Its contraction and expansion accompany the circulations of the life-streams; its slackening means swoon; its stoppage, death. The solar heart of the solar system also pulsates, in a period said to be eleven years — the sunspot period; an analogy about which we shall know more when we have studied better the magnetic and electric phenomena connected with the Sun.

The sun is the Logos of any hierarchy, which manifests itself as seven rays. The sun is the father of the gods. In mythology we find him represented as Helios and Sol, as Phoebus and Apollo. Sun-worship has always been universal. Ignorant people have supposed that sun-worshippers worship the visible orb of day only; they imagine that the Sun is nothing more than a vast globe of incandescent gases, and say that people who worship a globe of incandescent gases must be untutored, unlearned. What is really worshipped is the Spiritual Sun, of which the visible Sun is but an outer garment; and it is only natural that the Spiritual Sun should be invoked through its outer symbol. The outer ceremonial is made to correspond with the inner meaning; but there would be times when the inner meaning would be forgotten and the worship degenerate into empty form, as may happen in some religions. The Sun is the Divine Light striving to manifest itself in us; its light is reflected from a number of planets, and these may stand for the subordinate phases of our mentality.

The Moon is a complex symbol and it is not practicable to attempt a comprehensive survey of all its meanings. It stands between the Sun and Earth as a reflector of light and

life from the former to the latter. If we divide a human into Spirit, Soul, and Body, the Moon will stand for Soul — using that term in a wide sense, for the human intermediate nature, mental, psychic, emotional. The Moon is the imagination. The Moon goes through its phases, which are called the light and dark side of the Moon; in one phase it transmits light from Sun to Earth; in the other it gleams with a light borrowed from Earth. So our imagination may reflect the light of the Spiritual Sun or the lower light from the Earth. But our little satellite stands as representative of a far more august divinity — Isis, consort of Osiris, the great Mother, ever-fecund Nature. The Mother of the gods is the consort of the Father of the gods. The Great Mother has also been a universal cult. It represents the passive, receptive, fertile, feminine side of the manifested universe — in a word, Nature. This is the highest aspect of the lunar symbolism; but in another and lower aspect it stands for the “lesser light that rules the night.” (*Genesis* 1:16.) Hence we often find lunar worship, lunar magic, lunar cults, etc., contrasted unfavorably with the solar. One’s personal, passionate, emotional nature is sometimes called their lunar self, in contrast with their solar self, the Spiritual Ego. To avoid confusion we must keep in mind this fickle changeable nature of the Moon, causing it to have different significations; a clue that may help us to understand several things in our experience. If the Moon is Nature, then, like Nature, she may be anything from the bride of the Spiritual Sun to the womb of terrestrial nature.

The usual symbol of the Moon is a crescent, which is a duality as compared with the unity of the solar circle. The two aspects of the Moon are denoted in astrology by the ascending and descending nodes, called the Dragon’s head and tail, or Rāhu and Ketu in India; in the first the bulge is upward and the horns down; in the second it is the reverse way. This dragon represents the emotional side of our nature, which oscillates from high religious exaltation down to great physiological excitement at the other pole.

We have before mentioned the symbol of the planet Mercury as being composed of a circle with a crescent above and a cross below, and this may stand for a threefold representation of human nature, in which the circle or sun is the heart, the crescent or moon is the psychomental nature, and the cross is the physical. But we must not interpret such highly generalized symbols too narrowly, for they have special applications on many different planes. Thus we may take *ātman-buddhi* as being symbolized by Sun and Moon or Osiris and Isis, etc.; or again we may consider the higher triad as solar and the intermediate nature of a human as lunar; and again, if *prāṇa* is solar, *liṅga-śarīra* is lunar. Sun and Moon make a duad which is found throughout; and these two, with the cross added, make a triad which is of equally universal application. All this illustrates the importance of symbols as enabling us to sum up ideas too broad and general to be conveyed in any other way; and in interpreting them into word-language, we have to present first one aspect and then another, so that the essential meaning may be intuitively grasped out of the multitude of apparently diverse meanings. These symbols are embalmed in the figurative language of poetical diction and stock phrases; but modern scholarship, in discussing the figurative use of such words as Sun, Heart, Light, and the like, has usually viewed matters from the wrong end and supposed the figurative use to be derived from the concrete use. The sun which the sun-worshippers venerate is called an idealization of the astronomical Sun, and an expression like “the Heart of the Universe” may be regarded as a mere metaphor.

The Sun and Moon are everywhere the active and passive potencies, or we may say the masculine and feminine, the energetic and the formative, etc. — it does not much signify, so that we get the right idea. More attention is being paid to the influence of our moon in organic life, and it seems to have special relation to the vegetable kingdom. Some items of folklore, once dismissed by science as superstition, are receiving more attention.

The moon in classical symbology was denoted by Hecátē, a triple-headed divinity, which indicated a threefold character of the moon; for the goddess was powerful in the heaven-world, on Earth, and in the underworld. The moon presides over birth and death, which lead into each other. The reason for the moon being associated with things uncanny and black-magical is that in her function as goddess of the underworld she presides over the purificatory processes of Nature. We should not consort with the decaying remnants of creatures which, if let alone, will pass naturally along their appropriate arc in the cycle of evolution.

7 — THE TRIANGLE

This symbol is usually shown as an equilateral triangle with an apex up, or the same with an apex down. In many respects it represents the *triad* or group of three, and is often used synonymously therewith; but it includes more than a mere triad. For it has three points and three lines, which, with the figure itself, make up a septenary. This in mathematics represents the number of combinations of three things, represented as *a, b, c; ab, bc, ca; abc*. This can be applied to show how a septenate is derivable from a triad, how there are two triads, either of which, by the addition of the monad, becomes a quaternary. The triad is in one sense the first number after unity; for no sooner do we conceive a duality, than we get a trinity by thinking of the unity and the duality together.

A trinity stands at the head of every cosmogony and theogony; it really represents the limits of our thought. Everything which we know of in this world is dual, a pair of opposites; yet we are compelled to think of unity as underlying every duality. Thus hot and cold are the two extremes of temperature, positive and negative are the two poles of magnetism, every line segment has two ends, etc. Thus we have a trinity consisting of a duality and its underlying unity. If we consider life and death as a duality, we may well ask ourselves what is the unity of which they are the opposite phases. And we may ask similar questions as to light and darkness, and many other dualities. We find at the head of cosmogonies the One Life, a monad or unity, from which springs a duality of Spirit and Matter. The duality may be expressed in many ways, as male and female, energy and substance, force and matter, etc. The one is the basis of all active powers throughout the universe; the other is the basis of all receptive, formative, or substantial potencies. But this duality springs from a unity which contains both — the Spirit-Matter or unitary source of All. But besides this trinity we find another, denoted by Father-Mother-Son, of which the symbol would be an

inverted triangle. Here we see Spirit and Matter and their offspring, the Son, which is the Universe, or Humanity, as the case may be. Egypt has it as Osiris, Isis, and Horus. It is seen in the triad of Will, Thought, and Act, the last being the offspring of the two former. The Father is the Universal Spirit; then comes the Great Mother — Nature; from these are born (macrocosmically speaking) the worlds; and (microcosmically speaking) the Christos, the real Human. This is the real meaning of the saying that the Christ is the Son of God; but it is the Christ in all people, not in a particular person. The theology of today makes insufficient provision for the mother; if the symbology has a father and a son, a mother would seem to be indicated. But it has somehow vanished, and the trinity has been made up to number by the inclusion of the Holy Ghost. One church makes a great deal of the Virgin Mary, who is an adaptation of the pagan *Magna Mater* (Great Mother); but she is not a member of the Christian Trinity.

The triangle is often used in conjunction with the square to signify a triad and a quaternary, the former of which symbolizes the higher world, the latter the lower. Thus we have the seven human principles so divided into two main parts. As was stated under THE CROSS, a group of four often implies the lower manifested world, or what is sometimes called *matter* as opposed to *spirit*; for the number four is characteristic of material shapes and groupings, as are also the numbers six and eight, derived from it. We read in *The Secret Doctrine* (2:79) that, in order to make complete septenary human, the gift of Fire had to be made; this Fire was in the possession of the Triangles, free Intelligences, Flames. *Ātman-Buddhi-Manas* is a triad, and when it imbodyes it becomes a quaternary, and the imbodiment is itself fourfold, which makes seven.

The triangle symbol is not always used in the ordinary geometrical sense, wherein any of the points may be an apex; but it is considered as having a top and a bottom; the apex then represents a logos, from which emanate twin rays, the sides of the triangle. These rays, united at their upper extremities, are spanned at their lower ends by the base line, which thus signi-

fies the universe created by the interaction of these rays. In a similar way, a distinction is made between a triangle with the apex up and one with the apex down; the former being Fire, the latter Water, or again Spirit and Matter. The combination of these two makes Solomon's Seal, the interlaced triangles, the star hexagon in geometry; and this signifies the blending of Rūpa and Arūpa, Spirit with Matter, making with the central point, or with a circumscribed circle, the septenate. So this is a symbol of a complete human.

A pyramid with a square base, such as forms a well-known architectural symbol, shows rays proceeding from a point of union and diverging as they descend, until they compass a square at the bottom, while triangles define the sides; this is an elaboration of a symbol just mentioned. The tetrahedron is bounded by four triangles, thus combining these two numbers; and the cube has square faces and three dimensions; and many interesting things can be learned by the study of geometrical shapes.

When a monad becomes dual it passes from latency into activity, and when the duad becomes one, activity ceases on the plane of that duality. The duad signifies vibration, and the monad is the neutral center. One who realizes this possesses the power of balance and is no longer drawn from side to side. But it is important to observe that the real point of equilibrium is not the mere center of the line, halfway between the ends; it is not on the same plane. A pair of opposites is reconciled by a unity on a higher plane. This shows the distinction between a state of mere apathy or indifference and the true state of balance. Thus pleasure and pain are two poles of sensation; and the conquest of them does not mean a state of sensation which is neutral and indifferent, but an escape from the plane of that kind of sensation altogether, onto a higher plane of fuller life.

8 — THE SQUARE

This often denotes a quaternary or group of four, and in this sense it has to some extent been considered in connection with the cross and the triangle. A septenate or group of seven can be divided into a three and a four, a triad and a quaternary, which may be said roughly to represent Spirit and Matter. This is familiar to students of theosophy in the sevenfold human constitution, in which is distinguished the higher triad and the lower quaternary, the former denoting the spiritual and immortal part of a human, the latter one's earthly and mortal part. This is of course not a hard and fast division, but merely a rough one for convenience. Humans are not composed of a number of different principles put together, but each is a divine individuality manifesting itself through a series of vehicles. The same twofold division can be made as regards Nature in general; for we can speak of external nature, represented by the square, and internal nature or the spirit which animates external nature, represented by the triangle.

That the number four is characteristic of physical nature may be seen from a number of instances, especially if we bear in mind that the cube, although having six sides, is a derivative of the square. We have four points of the compass, and cubical shapes are the most frequent in mineral forms. We naturally lay out our buildings and furniture on a rectangular plan. In modern physics four coordinates are required to specify the position of an *event* in space-time. It has always been customary to speak of four elements as constituting the physical world — fire, air, water, and earth. These in modern physics are represented by heat, gas, liquid, solid, though there is some hesitancy about including heat in the list. In the lower quaternary of a human these are represented by *kāma*, *prāṇa*, *liṅga-śarīra*, and *sthūla-śarīra*.



But there are other ways in which the quaternary can be made. It has already been said that the higher triad becomes a quaternary when we add to it a unit which represents the lower world. Two meanings of the quaternary are shown in the well-known Pythagorean symbol of the Tetraktys. This represents four cosmic planes, and the fourth of these planes is itself a quaternary. In assigning names to these four planes, there might be some difference of choice, but the important thing to get is the idea. We might call them the monadic, the spiritual-mental, the psychomental, and the physical. The first is a unit, a Self; the next is a duad, representing action and bipolar force; the third is a synthesis of one and two; and the fourth is a kind of repetition of the second. The two and the four are vehicles; the one and the three are what acts through those vehicles. The four suits in the playing cards denote these four planes in the Tetraktys; for the cards derive from the Tarots, which are mystic symbolism and used in divination. The suits were batons, which have become clubs; cups, which are now hearts; swords, Italian *spade*, now spades; and coins or penta-
cles, now represented by diamonds. The symbolic meanings of the upright stroke or rod, of the cup, and of the sword (a form of cross, uniting a perpendicular and a horizontal line) are evident.

Under THE TRIANGLE we spoke of the Triad of Father, Mother, Son; and we read in *The Secret Doctrine* (1:60) that

the “Son” of the immaculate Celestial Virgin (or the undifferentiated cosmic protyle, Matter in its infinitude) is born again on Earth as the Son of the terrestrial Eve — our mother Earth, and becomes Humanity as a total — past, present, and future. . . . Above, the Son is the whole KOSMOS; below, he is MANKIND. The triad or triangle

becomes Tetraktis, the Sacred Pythagorean number, the perfect Square, and a 6-faced cube on Earth.

The figure of a square within a circle (or a cross within a circle) is one of the most sacred in occultism; it signifies completeness or perfection in the manifestation of the universe or of humanity from out of the Boundless.

The problem of squaring the circle means for the student of practical Occultism the adapting of finite life to the infinite, of Spirit to Matter, and Matter to Spirit. As geometry and mathematics, number and magnitude, are keys to cosmic architecture, it follows that the problem of squaring the circle is a most important key to unlock many mysteries.

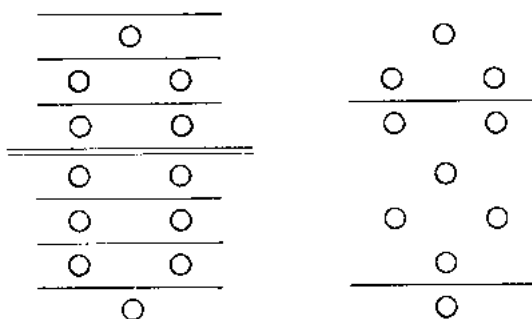
9 — THE SEPTENATE

The number seven, spoken of also as the septenate or septenary or heptad, is the most important number in symbology. It is universal in cosmogonies and theogonies and is familiar to us in innumerable familiar instances. Its use is both traditional and founded on experience: on the one hand we find septenary divisions and classifications which we should not have thought of making ourselves; and these are traditional. On the other hand we find that many things fall naturally into septenary divisions. It seems to be the key number of the present great cycle of evolution. To begin with, the Logos or One Deity, emanates seven rays, which are the World-Builders; and there are countless representations of this in the different theogonies: the seven sons of Aditi, the seven Amshaspendas, Angels of the Presence, Builders, Wheels, Sephiroth (Sefirot), Gods, etc., etc. And this is repeated on all planes till we get to the seven primary elements of the physical plane, the seven colors, seven notes of the scale, etc.

Seven, as before pointed out, is the number of combinations of three things, as algebraically represented by a, b, c ; ab, bc, ca ; abc . It is also the sum of three and four, triad and quaternary; it is two triads and a unit; it is six and one, as seen in the hexagon or the double triangle, each with central point, and in the six directions of space with their central point of origin. In occult symbology we hear of seven mystic vowels and seven sounds, and of the heptachord of Apollo which has reference to a good deal more than merely a musical instrument. When light is being spoken of, the septenate becomes seven colors, and these seven colors have their physical manifestation in the seven colors of our visual perception. It is said that from *darkness* comes light, and from white light come the seven colors and this means that from the unmanifest logos comes the manifest logos, and from that the seven rays. In physics white light is decomposable into seven colors; and the etheric vibrations to which the phenomena of light is referred

do not yield a visible effect until such effect is evoked by contact with physical matter; and thus we have darkness yielding light.

The positive side of creation is represented by seven forces or Sons of Fohat, etc., and the negative side by seven planes of materiality or seven cosmic planes; and correspondingly in the microcosm we have the sevenfold human constitution. The chemists Mendeléeff and Newlands arranged the chemical elements in a table according to the relation between their atomic weights and their properties, and found that they fall into a septenary scale; which is one among many proofs that physical nature follows the laws impressed upon it by primary nature. Seven sacred planets are enumerated, and connected with seven gods and other septenates; the visible planets are their *chariots*.



The number seven is related to the number twelve; as there are seven planets, so there are twelve zodiacal signs in which they move. Astrology gives one sign each to Sun and Moon and two signs each to the other five planets {Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn — Earth is the field of evolution, the receiving planet, not one of the transmitters of spiritual force}. Twelve is also the sum of seven and five. According to one interpretation, which is likened to “Ezekiel’s Wheel,” (*Ezekiel* 1:4-21) the signs from Aries to Libra (Aries,

Taurus Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra) inclusive are the seven, and the signs from Scorpio to the end (Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces) are the five. In the esoteric tradition twelve globes are placed on seven planes, and seven globes on four planes, as in the diagram. Sometimes the number ten is used in the enumeration of cosmic powers, and can be made by putting above the septenate a triad belonging to the archetypal world, as in the Sephirothal Tree, represented in the diagram; or again we may have a quaternary with a triad above it and an inverted triad below.

10 — THE ARK

Noah's Ark and the Ark of the Covenant will at once occur to the mind of those who have read the Christian Bible: different things, yet akin and almost identical in symbolism. Both were sacred vessels, and in that definition we may find the key to their identity. But those who think it necessary to believe that the Christian Bible is unique will be disconcerted if they chance to discover that the story of a deluge and an ark is worldwide, being found in the mythologies and religions of every people from China to Peru and from the Arctic Circle to the islands of Polynesia; so that it is necessary to go back very far indeed into antiquity to find the common source whence all these diverse peoples derived a story so uniform in all its essential features as is this universal deluge myth. In all these stories a people grown old in wickedness is destroyed by a flood; an ark is built, whereon are saved a select few, who land after the waters have subsided and form the origin of a new race.

The ancient history of our earth is written in indelible characters on the rocks that compose its crust, so that the humble geologist with their pick can read it. The stratigraphical record tells of periodic cataclysms which have overwhelmed large continental areas; of the rising and sinking of the land; of the pouring forth and drying up of waters; of widespread havoc wrought by the belching of subterranean fires. The searching eye of the astronomer learns to read the same record in the heavens, and to connect the story of vast cyclic displacements of the earth's axis with the tale of the geologic cataclysms. The past records itself automatically in books that "he who runs may read" (*Habakkuk 2:2*); but it also records itself indelibly in the astral light, where it can be read by seers as others read the printed book or the Braille script, according to the extent of their visual capabilities. Hence Nature's picture book tallies with the Secret Doctrine, that traditional record of cosmic evolution and the drama of humanity, preserved in the

myths and allegories and symbol language of the world's faiths.

We have said that a symbol condenses a world of meaning in small compass; so that, if several different interpretations are given to the same symbol, there is no contradiction but only amplification. We shall give several meanings to the ark symbol. It refers to deluges in general, and the passing of old races and the birth of new ones; it refers in particular to the last great flood, when the Fourth-Race continent of Atlantis sank and the first subraces of the Fifth Race took their rise, in new lands, from the saved remnants of the old race. Thus far we have geophysical applications of the symbol. But the ark in its widest significance means the womb of Nature, the Great Mother, the World-Soul, the container of all that is. This great feminine potency stands at the head of every theogony as its masculine counterpart, the sun or circle, is the All-Father, the active creative principle. But in using these terms we have to be careful not to give them a literal sense according to their analogies on the lowest planes of physical generation. For the ark was Isis, Moon, Venus, Diana, chaste emblems of eternal bounty, and in the seven human principles would be Buddhi. We have said something of this in *THE SUN AND MOON*.

Prescott tells of the surprise of the Jesuit missionaries on finding that the Peruvians already had the flood story; and in Daniel Brinton's *Myths of the New World* we find a large number of versions of the flood story among Indians of North, Central, and South America; it is among the ancient Scandinavians in the north and Polynesians in the south; in India, China, Africa. What theory can explain such universal diffusion, such uniformity in particulars? Only the theory of a common tradition, very ancient, reaching back to times when peoples now scattered were one; when there was a universal body of knowledge — the Secret Doctrine. In Greek mythology we have the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha, which tells how Zeus determined to destroy the world on account of its wickedness, and these two were saved on account of their piety; and how

they reseeded the earth by throwing behind them stones which became men and women. Refugees from sinking Atlantis settled in various places, bringing with them traditions of the great cataclysm.

But, as said, the ark symbol refers to more than geological cataclysms; for it signifies a sacred vessel which preserves the seed of a new growth after the destruction of the old. There are many tales of infants being consigned to vessels and set afloat on the waters, whence they are rescued to become the founders of new races; the story of the infant Moses is a case in point. The ark is the symbol of the womb of Nature, represented by the crescent of the Moon, by the solar boat of Egypt, the horns on the head of various female deities. The Spirit of God broods over the face of the deep (*Genesis* 1:2); the seeds of life are scattered in the great receptacle of primordial matter. The Hebrew Ark of the Covenant signified the same idea, for it was the sacred vessel of Deity; but in later times this original sublime meaning became corrupted into anthropomorphic conceptions.

11 — THE CHRIST

It may seem strange that we should include this among the symbols, but we do not propose to limit ourselves to those which can be drawn as pictures — though the Christ, to be sure, has one symbol in the cross (see THE CROSS). Christ may be for many people the name of a particular person, but it stands for a universal idea. Christ is the “Word made flesh” mentioned in *John* 1:14: “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” In the beginning of this gospel we have a fragment of Gnostic teaching, which connects Christianity with its parent source in the Wisdom-Religion. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . In him was life; and the life was the light of men.” (*Genesis* 1:1; *John* 1:4.) This is the original doctrine of the Ancient Wisdom. The Logos (Word) is a creative emanation of the supreme deity; it is at the same time one and many; it has their throne in the hearts of all people. Thus we are, in our inmost essence, a god; but this god has been *made flesh*; humans are an immortal soul imprisoned in a mortal body. The Jesus of the Gospels insists on this truth in many well-known passages; he usually speaks of the supreme deity as the Father, and of the Word or Logos as the Son. With this clue in mind, we can see that such was the teaching of Jesus: he desired to show people how they could achieve salvation by invoking their own divinity, by following in his footsteps. But this has been turned into the dogma that humanity’s nature is of itself corrupt, and that they can be saved only by faith in this particular god-man, Jesus of Nazareth.

The Jesus of the Gospels is a character, partly fictitious, partly symbolic, built around some actual personality, whose identity is buried among a confusion of historical and traditional materials. Though every person is an incarnation of divinity, there are some who are so in a special sense. These are people who have progressed in their individual evolution to a point beyond that reached by the average humanity of

their time, and who come to the world in times of spiritual darkness to teach the truths of the Ancient Wisdom. Such teachers are the world's Christs; and we find in the religions of India, Egypt, ancient America, and elsewhere, accounts similar in essentials to the Gospel narratives. The Savior is born by the Holy Spirit of a human virgin, is tempted and overcomes, is crucified on a cross, entombed for three days, rises again. That such is the fact can readily be ascertained by anyone wishing to do so, but it would unduly burden this article to enumerate instances. They can be found in *The Secret Doctrine* and other theosophical writings; they have been known to some eminent Christian writers, to whom they have been the occasion of much wonderment. Suffice it to say here that the story found in the Christian Bible and in their church doctrine is but a particular adaptation of a doctrine that is both old and everywhere diffused; and, in pointing this out, we are by no means disparaging Christianity, but merely reinstating it in the original dignity from which it has departed. The only thing we do call in question is the claim of the Christian doctrine to originality or exclusiveness or finality. And it is only right, in this age of general commingling of human races, that a broader and more tolerant attitude towards the claims of other religions should be adopted.

The hinge-point of the matter is in the individual responsibility of every person for their own salvation. It may be objected that it is presumptuous and impious to set up a person's strength against that of their divine Savior, the only Son of God; but here again we come upon an essential difference between the original doctrine and the perversion of it which has come to us. The perverted form tells us that humanity is essentially corrupt — due, it is said, to the sin of Adam — and that each consequently needs the special mercy of a savior in order to secure their salvation. But theosophy says that humanity is essentially divine, and such indeed is the teaching of Jesus; and that, being divine, each must save themselves by their own innate divinity. The doctrine that a person is saved by the divine love and grace, and despite their own unatoned

offences, may be very consoling, but it is both unjust and unbecoming. The law that we must reap as we have sown holds good; and if death deprives us of the opportunity of paying our debts to society in this life, then we shall have that opportunity in one of our lives to come. The Christ upon whom we must call for help is the Christ within — our own Higher Self.

The mind in each human — *manas* — is one's intelligence, neutral in itself, and colored by that to which it is allied. When allied to the earthly passional part of our nature, this mind becomes the lower personal self, at odds with other selves, and leading us away from our true path in life. But everyone has within them the principle of *buddhi*, divine wisdom; and if *manas* allies itself therewith, we have the Higher Self, which is our savior. It is taught that humans were originally created as an animal soul, which was later inspired by the breath of Divinity and so made into a potential god. This is the true divine incarnation; this is the Christ in each of us. But that Christ lies buried, latent, unmanifested, until called into active being by our own will. As has been pointed out, the symbol of the Christ is the cross, or, more accurately the cross surmounted by the circle, thus making the sign of the planet Venus. In the symbology of the seven sacred planets, Venus stands towards the Earth in the same relation as the Higher Self stands to the lower self. The circle denotes divinity — the "Word"; the cross denotes matter; so that the whole symbol denotes the "Word made flesh," that dwells among us. The mystery of the Christ is therefore that of the divine power descending into matter, for the purpose of operating in the lower kingdoms of Nature. The divine power is at first sacrificed; for its radiance is obscured, its voice drowned, amid the turmoil of material life and the selfish passions. But it is one's redeemer, and must sooner or later arise from the tomb in the true resurrection, when one becomes fully aware of one's own divinity. This, for the individual, may take place at any time; for the human race as a whole, at the appropriate cyclic era in the future. When a person, having thus resurrected the Christ within them, becomes perfected, one is able to go forth to the

world as a teacher; either one of those Teachers whose presence remains concealed, or one of the great founders of religions, or perhaps the originator of some great philosophic school like those of Pythagoras and Plato.

So the symbol of the Christ may mean that which takes place in the life of everyone, or it may mean the case of some particular manifestation of divinity, such as the Buddha or the mysterious teacher upon whose unknown life has been built the legend of Jesus of Nazareth.

12 — THE EGG

This is a very favorite and comprehensive symbol. Its spheroidal shape and its function as a life-germ are alike emblematic, and are connected with each other, as will appear. The Christian Easter is largely made up from an ancient North European festival of rebirth, which was celebrated in Spring, which is the appropriate time of year for such a festival, as it is then that Nature comes to new life. It was not the birth of the year that was celebrated; it was rebirth in general, but that particular time was chosen as being most fitting. The egg is of course a familiar accompaniment of Easter celebration, and has not much to do with the ecclesiastical side of the festival, as far as one can see. But scholars will tell us that the egg was used by others besides the Northern peoples and their christianized successors, and that it has been universally venerated as a sacred symbol, many people refraining from eating it on that account.

The egg stands for that primordial Chaos, that Great Deep, Waters of Space, etc., mentioned in cosmogonies as being the great womb of Nature, the Virgin Mother, out of which the universe is produced by the fructifying breath of Divine Spirit. But again, the same symbol is used to denote the universe thus produced, and in this sense it is spoken of as the Mundane Egg or World-Egg. The comparison of the universe with a great egg is a most profound and apt analogy, and is naturally to be found in all cosmogonies. The spheroidal shape is that of all the worlds that revolve in spaces, as also the shape of eggs, seeds, and germs in general, drops of water, and many other things. The sphere is the most comprehensive of all shapes and the most perfect and yet simple of forms, produced by an exact balance of forces expansive and contractile and equal in all directions. Cosmogonies usually go on to describe the splitting of this egg into parts representing the heavens and the earth, etc., and the respective symbolism of shell, white, and yolk. Within the egg is the germinal point; and by, study-

ing the anatomy and physiology of the egg before fructification, and the various stages of development of the embryo after fructification, much can be learned about universal law by analogical reasoning. The development of the egg is actually a repetition of the entire cosmic process by which worlds and living beings are created. Can this be merely an interesting analogy, an accidental coincidence? No; for the same laws pervade the whole universe, as a whole, in its greater parts, and down to its minutest subdivisions; and there is not a living being, however minute and apparently inert, but is following those laws of development, at one stage or another. The body of each person is born from an egg, though this is developed internally, instead of being dropped as is the case with fowls. A seed may be called an egg — the difference is little more than a question of names.

So the egg stands as symbol of that most comprehensive of laws with which theosophy deals — universal self-evolution. The universe is a vast aggregate of living beings, all of which are evolving, each according to its own particular stage in the vast process, and according to the particular cosmic hierarchy to which it may belong. And the process is one of self-directed evolution from within. A mechanical doctrine of evolution tries to represent it as a process of accretion or adding together of parts; but that would not be evolution, not natural growth. Such a process would result in a chaotic mass of unorganized fragments; evolution demands that there should be a plan on which to build. That plan is contained in the germ within the egg. Biologists can watch the actual process taking place; but, though they see the scenes shifting, they cannot with their microscopes discern the scene-shifters.

All we can see with the microscope is the builders as they emerge from invisibility; the life-forces at the moment when they enter upon the plane of physical matter. We can trace things back to a minute speck, and no farther. That minute germinal speck is the point where the forces enter the physical plane. There is an ancient saying that *omne vivum ex ovo* (all life [comes] from the egg), and since the universe is composed

entirely of living beings, the egg must be omnipresent as being the germinal form of every organism, whatever natural kingdom it may belong to. In the numerical symbology of the Secret Doctrine the cipher is sometimes called the egg, which it resembles in its shape; and this, taken with the straight stroke representing the fecundating principle, makes the sign for the number ten (10). The zero does not imply mere nihility — an utterly untenable idea — but simply the absence of number; it is *no number*; so that the circle represents the universe in an unmanifested state, which to our conceptions appears as nothing, though it is All.

13 — THE DOUBLE TRIANGLE AND THE PENTAGRAM



The familiar six-pointed figure is formed by superimposing two equilateral triangles, so that their apexes are symmetrically spaced around a circle. It is the regular star hexagon in geometry. Sometimes the figure is elaborated by making the lines double, so that the triangle can be interlaced; or again they may be differently colored, or the upright one made light, the other dark. It is often called Solomon's Seal and is a symbol in the Jewish Kabbala; but it is found in ancient India, whence it was probably adopted by the Hebrews. But it is one of the symbols of the universal Wisdom-Religion. These two triangles represent the duality of manifestation, the duality of Nature, variously spoken of as Spirit and Matter, Fire and Water, etc. Here we find them interlocked, thus producing a compound or completed nature. The number 6 is thus obtained, and by adding the central point, or alternatively by enclosing the figure in a circle, we get the synthesizing seventh. The six therefore represents the manifested Logos, which is six-fold (or often spoken of as sevenfold, including the synthesis).

This Logos as first emanation is called the Virgins of Life or the Great Illusion; the sixth sign of the zodiac is that of the Virgin. In *The Secret Doctrine* it is mentioned as signifying the 6 directions of space, the blending of pure Spirit and Matter, Arūpa and Rūpa, and is said to be a sign of Vishnu (Viṣṇu), though elsewhere Vishnu is made to correspond to the inverted triangle only. We must not try to make the symbolism too rigid and precise, for such names as Vishnu are complex in their

meaning, and moreover different schools of philosophy have their own ways. The alchemists would have called these two triangles the fiery and the moist principles. They represent the human dual nature, and the six points stand for the six powers or forces of Nature, six planes, six principles, etc., synthesized by the seventh. The shapes of snow crystals are often mentioned as a familiar instance of this sixfold-principle, and it represents the six primary axes in the cubical system of crystallization. If a glass cube is held up in a certain position, its twelve edges will show the double triangle within the hexagon. Other names for these six primary forces are the Sephiroth of Construction, Dhyān-Chohans, Prajāpatis, Builders of the lower physical universe — according to the plane which is being illustrated.

This figure is often placed on doors in India as a talisman against evil; but the best protection is the inward harmony we may attain by meditating on its meaning.

The Pentagram



The five-pointed star, or the star polygon of the number five, is made by marking five equidistant points on a circle and joining each to the next but one; the lines and angles are equal, the angles being 36° , 72° , and 108° . The sections of the lines exhibit the Golden Ratio, by which a line is divided into extreme and mean ratio, that ratio being .618 or 1.618, which plays so important and interesting a part in geometry. In symbolism this figure is often taken as synonymous with the number five, the pentad. The Pythagoreans called it the *pentalpha*, because it was like five alphas (A). It combines the two and the three, the first even and the first odd numbers after unity, representing therefore among many other things, on the uni-

versal plane, the union of cosmic substance with cosmic intellect. If the three is combined with the four (another symbol of matter) we get the seven. As a union of five elements it stands for the heavenly or macrocosmic human and its five points correspond to the head and limbs of a person's body; the same idea lies behind the five wounds of Christ. When the star has its point down, it signifies the polar opposite of the preceding, that is, the nether or material pole of cosmic life; and so can be used as a black magical symbol — the horns of evil are said to be up. The combination of these two produces the decad, in a similar way to that by which the two triangles are combined in Solomon's Seal; and thus we get another symbol of humanity's dual nature, and of the dual aspect of cosmic forces. In connection with this, astrologers will remember that each of five planets has two houses, a day house and a night house; while Sun and Moon have each one house, so that we have here the five, the ten, and the twelve, harmonized together. Five is specially important in our times because we are in the Fifth Root-Race, and five elements have so far been manifested (the fifth, aether, only partially as yet). We have five digits on each limb; five is the most frequent number for the petals of a flower, we use the denary scale (twice five), and the number five plays a leading part in the geometry of the dodecahedron and icosahedron. In *The Secret Doctrine* we find the pentagon used for the number five in the formula 31415, the other figures likewise being denoted by geometrical signs.

In the article "The Twelve Signs of the Zodiac" in *Five Years of Theosophy*, Subba Row tells us that Makara, the tenth sign, is a word compounded of *five* and *hand*, so that it stands for two pentagrams. In *The Secret Doctrine* the pentagram stands for the fifth order of Creative Powers.

14 — THE LOTUS

Held sacred from the remotest antiquity as emblem of the productive power of Nature, both spiritual and physical. But in calling it a symbol, let us remember what has been said about symbols in general: that, as the word is used in these articles, a symbol is not an arbitrary sign chosen by somebody to represent something because it seems appropriate, but an actual manifestation of the idea or quality or power which it represents. The universe is a manifestation of the cosmic seed and the plant kingdom is one of the hierarchies of the manifested world. There can be no potency or quality or principle in human nature, spiritual, mental, or physical, which has not its counterpart somewhere in the plant kingdom; in the plants we find an inexhaustible wealth of forms and colors and perfumes and curative essences; astrology and herbalism have found out what plants belong to what planetary spirits, and what are good for certain ills. The lotus must evidently be — not a plant arbitrarily chosen — but *the* plant in particular which wise ones of old have discovered to be the actual counterpart of this universal productive power in Nature, whether we call it spiritual nature or physical nature, or what not. One feels, in studying what has been said about the symbolism, that more might have been said; but the truth of a revelation consists not so much in what is said as in what is conveyed to the mind of the hearer; and this latter must depend in no small degree on the condition of that mind.

The lotus grows in the earth, sends its stem through the water, and blossoms in the air and sun; so that it has its home in the four elements and rises from the lowest to the highest. The seeds contain, even before they germinate, perfectly formed leaves, the miniature shape of the plants they will become. What better emblem could there be of that principle by which the part is a miniature of the whole? In a machine or a building the parts do not at all resemble the whole; in an organism it is otherwise.

The lotus, says *The Secret Doctrine* (1:380), is the flower sacred to Nature and her gods, and represents the abstract and the concrete universes. It was held sacred by the Āryan Hindus, the Egyptians, the Buddhists, and by China and Japan. The Christian churches adopted the symbol using however the Easter or Madonna lily; in pictures of the Annunciation, Gabriel appears to the Virgin holding them in his hand. It typifies Fire and Water, the two creative principles. This is the same idea as that of the lotus in the hand of the Bodhisattva who announces to Mahā-Māyā the birth of the Buddha. Osiris and Isis were represented in association with the lotus. The lotus is a well-known form of the capital in Egyptian columns. The lotus is the two-fold type of the divine and human hermaphrodite, being of dual sex. Fire and Water are the symbolic names of the two creative powers, the one being energetic, the other receptive and formative. They are Father-Mother, and produce the Son, which is the manifested universe, or a world, or human, or any other being that is produced. In the Christian Bible, the divine spirit is represented as brooding on the waters of space (*Genesis* 1:2, 6-7), and similar emblems are found in all other cosmogonies. The lotus symbolizes the emanation of the objective from the subjective, Divine Ideation passing into concrete form. In the first chapter of *Genesis* (1:11-12), it is said: "And God said, Let the earth bring forth . . . the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, *whose seed is in itself*."

The analogy to the birth of a child is shown by the attachment of the seed-bearing flower by a long stalk to Mother-Earth, from whom it draws nourishment; and in some representations a child is seen seated on the flower. But the original impersonal and pantheistic and reverential view of the early Āryans has been degraded in some later religions by attaching too much importance to the physiological aspect.

THE SEAL OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY



THE SEAL OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY was adapted from H. P. Blavatsky's personal seal, used by her before the Society was founded in 1875. The symbols it contains are so ancient that nobody knows when they were first used to express universal ideas. They far antedate any political or other modern applications, and have nothing to do with any social or political movements. They are in fact part of the universal mystery-language that can convey wordlessly to the mind sacred truths of nature.



The Serpent swallowing its tail: A very ancient symbol depicting eternity and the continuity of cyclic time. Like the biblical serpent of Paradise lost understood mystically, it represents wisdom and, because of its ability to shed its skin, regeneration and rebirth. As a circular symbol it signifies to the Hindus the outbreathing and inbreathing of Brahmā (“expander”), the cosmic creator: when Brahmā breathes out, worlds come into being; when he breathes in, all is reabsorbed into the divine essence. The descending arc of the serpent’s body signifies worlds descending into matter; the ascending arc, their evolution toward spirit. This spiral circulation is eternal, implying evolution through time. The circle itself represents perfection and the restoration of universal harmony; also the Boundless from which all manifestation springs and to which all will return. The symbol is found also in ancient Egypt, Greece, and West Africa, and among Buddhists and Jains, Gnostics and alchemists.



The Swastika: A Sanskrit word meaning “well-being,” “auspicious” — the perennial symbol of good fortune found in the cradle of ancient cultures of India, China, Japan, and the Americas, as well as Greece and Rome (including the early Christians). In Scandinavia it was Thor’s hammer and in India Vishnu’s discus and the Jaina cross. In Buddhism, it expresses the “wheel of the Law.” Symbol of evolution and perpetual motion, the swastika denotes the ever-churning “mill of the gods,” in whose center is the soul, while the bent arms suggest the ceaseless turning of the wheels of life throughout universal existence. When we look at photos of faraway spiral galaxies, we are wonderstruck to see that they clearly resemble swastikas in their vortical motion.



The Interlaced Triangles: Known in the Occident as King Solomon's seal or star, it was called in India the seal of Vishnu. The interlaced triangles signify the bipolarity in nature — spirit and matter, or male and female. The apex of the white triangle represents the divine monad; the apex of the dark triangle, the manifested worlds. The upward triangle suggests spirit, consciousness, and concealed wisdom, which are mirrored in the downward-pointing triangle representing matter, receptive space, manifestation, or wisdom revealed. The sides of the dark triangle may stand for form, color, and substance; the three gunas or fundamental qualities; and the creative, preserving, and destructive/regenerative forces of the Hindu triad, Brahmā, Vishnu, and Śiva.

Together the triangles represent the manifested universe evolved from the central point within the serpent-circle of time and space. They also form the hexagon of six principles, cosmic and human, emanating from and synthesized by the central point, the seventh and highest self of any evolving being. Thus they express the sevenfold structure of the universe. The central cross is the inner person, touching all things from the six sides through the six triangles. The six points of the star reach outward toward the serpent of eternity, growing and evolving through time.



The Ansated Cross, Ankh, or Tau: A sacred symbol particularly associated with ancient Egypt, it signifies life, regeneration, and the descent of spirit from inner realms into the worlds of substance. It can denote a universe in embryo, the circle representing the cosmic or spiritual germ or egg hovering over the cross of matter which has issued from it; or limitless, uncreated space. Astronomically it is the sign of Venus, Earth's sister-planet and guardian of humanity. Applied to the human race, it may represent the evolution of mankind into the bipolarity of male and female, as well as the initiate who holds the key to the mysteries when united with his own spiritual intelligence.

These spiritual symbols forming the seal of The Theosophical Society together comprise an entire philosophy of the inner workings of man and universal nature. Taken as a whole, the seal represents the spiritually reborn person, symbolized by the tau/cross in the center, evolving through the six human and cosmic principles and encircled by the serpent of evolution of spirit in and through matter. On the larger scale, it expresses a universe expanding into manifestation from cosmic spirit.

The seal used here is a replica of the original TS seal, printed in the Society's first *Preamble and Bylaws*, October 30, 1875.

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