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Johanna Vermeulen lecture

P R E S E R V I N G T H E F U T U R E

This lecture was not planned, The program listed a lecture by Michael Gomes, well-known publicist, editor and historian, specializing in the history of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and the Theosophical Movement.

Unfortunately, he was not able to be here during the conference, and his lecture, “Preserving the Future,” is replaced by my lecture with the same title. That presents no difficulty since Michael Gomes worked for many years in TS Adyar in the Archives and Library, and he is Curator of a New York Library, while I am the archivist of the TS Point Loma Blavatskyhouse and work on the conservation of the Point Loma Archives. So preserving the future is a subject close to my heart.

Archivists very often have the reputation of living in the past. This lecture will show that a *real* archivist is concentrated on the future. What should be the aim on an archivist? Certainly not surrounding oneself with books and magazines safely hidden from the present – that is, the turmoil and stress of daily life.

The task of an archivist, especially a theosophical archivist, is to make available the written products of the great inspirators of the Theosophical Movement to all: books, not meant as interesting esoteric consumption products to enlarge only your knowledge, but rather study-material, training-material, for everyone who wants to train themselves to follow in the footsteps of these inspirators. To do the same work in the world as they did, albeit on a smaller, more modest scale.

Keynote

To understand the *keynote* of this lecture, you have to be taken back in history: in the 1970s, when Herman and I became members of the TS, we saw a rich variety of theosophical organizations. And to understand what seemed chaotic, I started as an archivist in embryo, to create order in this chaos by going back in history. I discovered a **seed** that grew into a theosophical **tree** with many branches. I hope that lifelong members still recall how confusing it is for newcomers.

How did I overcome this confusion? For my first White Lotus Day, I read the selection of fragments of Blavatsky’s letters called “She Being Dead Yet Speaketh.” William Quan Judge selected them to read on the first White Lotus

Day in 1892, the day all friends of Blavatsky come together to concentrate on her life and on the continuation of her work.

One sentence, from one of those letters, struck me very positively. HPB says: *“To live like cats and dogs in the TS is positively against all rules and wishes of the Master, as against our Brotherhood, so-called, and all its rules. They are disgusted. They look on, and in that look (oh Lord! if you could only see it as I have) there’s an ocean of deep and sad disgust, contempt, and sorrow...”*

Now you perhaps wonder – why so *positively* moved by this sad sentence? Because Blavatsky taught me in one tiny second that we always have to look at the theosophical tree *from the Masters’ perspective*. Not imagining that we are Masters, of course, that would be extremely arrogant, but observing our theosophical work and behavior, not from our **branch** or even **twig** of the theosophical tree, but from its **stem** and preferably from its **roots**. For the tree is rooted in the age-old Lodge of Wisdom and Compassion.

And then, at once, your task and the decisions you have to make become so much easier: you recognize that on all other branches there are birds, some singing, some twittering, but always some birds with that same broad Stem-and-Root view. All confusion vanishes when you simply forget the branches and concentrate on those roots that feed the whole tree. Branches can break, fruits can fall, but the roots will stay. And from the roots, other trees will grow in the future.

And I think I am not alone in this experience; it is the eye-opener for many of us here.

Contents

Now having established the keynote, let us start with the *contents* of this lecture. For that, I want to take you again back in history, but now much further back to a period that is very important for the future of our work. Tomorrow, Will Windham will take you to the first ten years of the life of the TS, but I take you now to the period of the last five years of the life of H.P.Blavatsky, especially the years 1886 to 1889. These are the most fruitful years of Blavatsky’s life.

1. After she left India for good in 1885, she went to Europe where she continued writing the book that later proved to be her master-work, “The Secret Doctrine.” She stayed in Wurzburg, Germany and in Ostende, Belgium while working on it.

In 1887, a small group of London Theosophists, led by the 27 year-old Bertram Keightley, visited her in Ostende and asked her to move to London and finish her “SD” there, with the help of the London members. A few days later, she moved to London and, three weeks later, she formed, with a small group of young members, the Blavatsky Lodge, which had its meetings weekly on Thursday evenings. Some of those young member helped her prepare “The Secret Doctrine.”

To bring structure to the enormous amount of information in the book, they decided to take as the basis a number of Stanzas from the Book of Dzyan. Around these Stanzas they modeled, they built information: Seven Stanzas in the first volume on the origin and evolution of the Kosmos; Twelve Stanzas in the second volume on the origin and evolution of Humanity.

2. In 1887, she also started her second magazine, *Lucifer, The Lightbringer*. The first two volumes contain unforgettable, famous articles, forming a book of their own.

3. In 1888, the first volume of “The Secret Doctrine” was published and was immediately a worldwide success – all copies sold out within one day.

4. In 1888, she also started her Esoteric School, meant for members who promised to themselves to dedicate their life to the spiritual growth of mankind, to have compassion, to be co-workers with the Masters of Wisdom and Compassion. And, in this Esoteric School, she gave her deeper teachings.

5. In 1889, she started a series of studies in the Blavatsky Lodge to give the young members the opportunity to ask her their questions on the Seven Stanzas of Volume One of “The Secret Doctrine.”

6. In 1889, HPB wrote in a few weeks her most *practical* book, “The Key to Theosophy,” for all who found “The Secret Doctrine” a little too difficult. In “The Key to Theosophy,” she bundled all practical questions people asked her during many years, on everyday problems, plus her very useful answers.

7. Later, in 1889, she wrote her most *mystical* book, “The Voice of The Silence,” dedicated “To The Few.” In this little book, she explains the core, the basis, the soul of Compassion and the seven paramitas, the seven noble character aspects we have to evolve to become a Master of Compassion ourselves.

Now, all of this is very well known to Theosophists all over the world: You can buy “The Secret Doctrine,” “The Key to Theosophy,” and “The Voice of The Silence.” The Esoteric Instructions she gave in her Esoteric School you can read in volume 12 of her Collected Writings.

There is just one gap in her work that was never filled: the months that she studied the Stanzas of “The Secret Doctrine” with her young students in the Blavatsky Lodge. It is known there was a stenographer present at those meetings. It is also known that two small brochures with the very abridged text of the first ten meetings were published in 1890 and 1891, now known as “The Transactions of The Blavatsky Lodge,” which you can find in volume 10 of her Collected Writings. But no one knew where the complete, unabridged stenographic notes were. The idea was that they were lost.

So the general idea among Theosophists was that the answers we have in “Transactions” are all the support we have from HPB when we study the “SD” and the Stanzas of Dzyan.

You can imagine how glad and surprised we were when, at the International Theosophical Conference last year in Los Angeles, Michael Gomes approached us with the request to print and publish the book he was preparing.

Years before, some staff members of the United Lodge of Theosophists had asked him to transcribe the original handwritten notes of the available 21 of 24 meetings of the Blavatsky Lodge. All these years, these notes were in the possession of Mr. Wadia, one of the important inspirators of the ULT. After his death, they were found and there were a few unsuccessful attempts to prepare the text for publication.

Michael Gomes then started the project, assisted by some ULT members. He and the ULT team worked on steadily, quietly, in silence. Why in silence? Because all great things are born in silence. Every Theosophist knows from experience that every important Theosophical project suffers unexplainable adversities when that project is made too broadly known. That is simply the Karma of our theosophical work.

So we were very glad to dedicate our time, money and work to this project. During one whole year we continued in this line of quiet work. And, together with Michael Gomes, our team of members prepared, printed and now present to all of you this book, “The Secret Doctrine Commentaries: The Unpublished 1889 Instructions.”

What had been only some 90 pages published as “Transactions” in pamphlets in 1890 and 1891 proved to be some 650 pages of invaluable information. Michael wrote a very good and thorough Introduction and we added a very helpful Index.

One very positive detail is that this project rises above the Branch-level of the Theosophical tree to the Stem-and-Root level. For Michael has worked for many years in the TS Adyar; the manuscript and first efforts came from members of the ULT; and the last phase, the production of this book, happened in the Blavatskyhouse, the Point Loma TS. Hopefully, this co-operation is a good start for the future of theosophical work.

And, in this whole project, all personal ambitions and reputations have been successfully neglected. What remains is the quality of the contents of this book.

H.P. Blavatsky



**The Secret Doctrine
Commentaries**
The Unpublished 1889 Instructions

TRANSCRIBED AND ANNOTATED BY MICHAEL GOMES

The Book

What can we tell you about the book, about these “Secret Doctrine Commentaries” itself? The text was unpublished for so many years, so the first questions is,

Is it an **esoteric** book? Do we have to keep it uncirculated?

The answer is, No, certainly not. Blavatsky says in the book, on page 425, *“The Secret Doctrine’ is not an occult book, as I told you, but a printed work for the public.”*

And, on page 640, *“There are esotericists here, and exotericists. The esotericists will be terribly confused if we speak in this way, and the exotericists still more.”*

For the meetings of the Blavatsky Lodge and the Esoteric School were held in the same period.

And William Kingsland, the Blavatsky Lodge President, says in his article on *“The Secret Doctrine,”* Appendix 3 of the book:

“Those who are members of the Esoteric Section of the T.S. have a better chance of understanding the matter than the ordinary reader, but since

numbers who have attended our Thursday evening meetings are not Esotericists, it has been impossible to treat the matter from any but an exoteric standpoint.”

Thus, we may conclude that this book could be published without any objection.

So, if this is not an esoteric book, then what makes this book **unique**?

The uniqueness of this book is the fact that it is the only manuscript of Blavatsky where we can read her spoken words in their original form, unedited, unchanged, unpolished. The great advantage of this text over her other books and articles is that this text, just because of its relative rawness, has 100% retained the original inspirational power of the Teacher, a thing you will not find so strongly elsewhere in her publications.

The text is so lively that we may well imagine ourselves to be present at those meetings, to take part in those studies. For the questions that Bertram Keightley read to her could well be ours, and the answers she gives are often the answers we ourselves were looking for for so many years. You are not just *reading* the notes of the meetings, you become part of them. And that makes this book unique and attractive.

Another unique thing is the method she uses to stimulate her students. She follows the age-old method of evoking the inner understanding of her students, in the form of questions and answers, a method you will also recognize in the dialogues of Plato and in the Raja Yoga method we discussed this morning.

A great advantage for us is the fact that her young students did not quite understand her answers immediately, so they asked her again and again on the same subject. And she answers and answers for many pages, until Archibald and Bertram Keightley, or Doctor Williams, or Alfred Sinnett, respond with a clear conclusion. This gives *us* ample time to build up our own clear view on the subject.

Blavatsky Lodge

What makes the Blavatsky Lodge so special? The Blavatsky Lodge studies were attended by a small group, only 8 or 10 members, five of them around 30 years old: Bertram Keightley, 29 years old; Archibald Keightley (his nephew), 30 years old; Walter Old, 25 years; George Mead, 26 years; and William Kingsland, 31 years and, for some time, the President of the Lodge.

Do the Theosophists of today realize that Blavatsky stimulated members of that age to read the “SD,” to contemplate on the ideas, and to formulate their questions? While so often we hear, nowadays, advice to young enthusiastic visitors and members, “Oh, ‘The Secret Doctrine’ is too difficult for you to read; start with something easier. The ‘SD’ comes later.”

Do you realize her wisdom? She did not look at their age or their relative lack of experience in life; she looked at their reincarnating part, the richness of the experience of their souls and the inner potency to play an important, inspiring role in the TS in the future.

This is what she said to Walter Old, and I quote page 643 of the book where Blavatsky asks him what made him what he is; and he answers, "It is my Atma."

She corrects him and says that "his Atma" is not his, that he has no Atma distinct from others. No, she says. *"It is your ego, and your incarnating ego. It is that which you were in past lives that makes you what you are, a young man of 25 that has such a wonderful capacity of grasping all these things."*

Do you see the timeless way she looks at her students, the way she makes them look at themselves? And isn't that exactly what we have to learn when we chair a theosophical group-study, or even look for our own possibilities?

Indeed, Bertram Keightley became a lifelong, very important co-worker in the TS Adyar. Archibald Keightley was one of the strong supporters of William Quan Judge in his theosophical work in the United States. George Mead became Blavatsky's secretary and, after her death, a world-famous pioneer in the introduction, translation and explanation of Western mysticism - the Gnostic, the Hermetic, the Orphic Wisdom; he was the first translator of the *Pistis Sophia* in English. In addition, William Kingsland and Walter Old both became famous writers.

Subjects studied

What subjects were studied by the Blavatsky Lodge? It is not possible to discuss 650 pages; I can only give you the main themes.

First, all seven Stanzas and their commentaries in Volume One of "The Secret Doctrine" – these seven Stanzas represent the seven stages in the evolution of the universe. So the first Stanza describes the most unexplainable first phase. And, page after page, you find information on the First Fundamental Proposition, the Omnipresent, Eternal Principle. Terms such as The Absolute, IT, the Sanskrit terms Parabrahman and SAT, the Hebrew term Ain-Soph – she places them all in perspective; she shows what they are and what they are not. And, chapter after chapter, your vision will ripen.

And, after that, the same is done with later Stanzas where the birth of all living beings in the Universe is described, and the hierarchies of beings – the Sanskrit Dhyana Chohans, the Hebrew Sephiroth, the Gnostic Aeons. These later Stanzas are described in the Second and Third Fundamental Propositions: the great fullness of all living beings, constantly appearing and disappearing, born and dying.

She answers questions on the real nature of Consciousness, the seven states of Consciousness; on the infinitude of the Atom; on the sevenfold nature of Man; and many pages on the after-death state of man.

In addition, she explains to the scientists in her group the deeper meaning of terms like Life, Light, Fire, Fohat, Gravity and the universal forces of attraction and repulsion

After their study of the seven Stanzas, the situation changes because, in that period, Blavatsky was writing her book “The Key to Theosophy” and she asks the members of the Blavatsky Lodge to give ideas and advice on the way to formulate the subjects in the book, especially the chapters on the practical Theosophy, on how Theosophists think of Duty, Charity and Self-Sacrifice.

Together they train themselves to explain to the new readers of “The Key to Theosophy” three important subjects: Reincarnation, Karma and Devachan. She gives during that training details on Karma and Devachan I have never found in her other writings.

“The Secret Doctrine Commentaries: The Unpublished 1889 Instructions” ends with the last recorded meeting of June 20, 1889, and, to me, this is the most remarkable meeting of all. The subject of study that evening seems to have nothing to do with the Stanzas of “The Secret Doctrine.” But it contains the ultimate basis for understanding them. Blavatsky starts this meeting with the following words: *“Now you have got to study for yourselves. The only thing I can give you is just to put the ‘Key’ in your hands and say: This opens this way, and this that way, and so on.”*

You see her hint to her students not to ask her any more questions but to start searching for answers within themselves.

The first thing that then comes up in their discussion is: *“How to conceive of the relationship between these celestial hierarchies of Dhyani Chohans and the physical forces, or what we call physical forces with which we are ordinarily familiar.”*

In other words, how can we obtain knowledge of the highest spiritual beings; how can we form for ourselves an inner idea of the highest spiritual aspects of the universe and their relation with our ordinary daily life, with all the infinite forces, phenomena, and aspects of *objective* Nature?

And the training Blavatsky gave to them is not to give answers but to stimulate them to discover the fact that the main factor in this question is *“by using our intuition.”*

For some 30 pages, she challenges them to tell her what intuition is and how to activate that intuition in yourself. And that is exactly what a teacher, or director of a theosophical study-group does – awakening the inner Buddhic faculties.

Exactly what we ask ourselves: how can we see our highest inner wisdom and apply it in our daily life, with our relatives, our colleagues, our friends, our enemies? Therefore, this last chapter is a *must* for everyone who wants to contribute to a better future of humanity and our planet.

So, in conclusion, today we offer you this unique book, “The Secret Doctrine Commentaries,” subtitled “The Unpublished 1889 Instructions,” a book with which you can change the future of humanity.

And for this once - and I hope you agree - to make an exception and thank some Theosophists:

- the staff members of the ULT who guarded this manuscript for so many years and who initiated the whole project;
- Michael Gomes for preparing this book during many years;
- the team members in the Blavatskyhouse who gave so much of their free time, canceled their holidays, to make it possible to present this book today to you all as well as the rest of the world.

And I hope I speak for all of you when we want to thank all of our speakers at this Conference as well as the strong motor behind the ITC activities, Sally and Jim Colbert, by giving all of them the first copies of this book.

And, for everyone in attendance, we have arranged a large table with many copies, here in the hall, so that you can have a first impression of the book, its content and its quality.

We do hope you all will enjoy this unique book as much as we do.

The book can be ordered at the Blavatskyhouse webshop:

<http://www.blavatskyhouse.org/newbook.html>