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Thoughts Along the Road

The Truth About The Theosophical Movement



The above image was first published in India

* Are there differences of opinion between the various schools of thought present in the theosophical movement? Without a doubt. Are these differences sometimes intense? Yes. They are inevitably challenging because they express the painful and ceaseless struggle taking place in the human soul between truth and illusion.

* Contrasts and failures are part of life and must not be denied. This does not mean one should lose sight of the brighter side of reality.

* There is a common essence to the entire theosophical movement. Its subtle, elevated substance is far more important than the flaws and differences of vision between sectors of the movement.

* The different Lodges and Societies bring together altruistic people from all over the world. The movement does an excellent job for humanity. Its actions are rarely spectacular or loud, but they are effective in their own way.

* Some of the mistakes of the Movement are discussed by the Independent Lodge of Theosophists. The movement must carefully observe its mistakes, learn from them, and overcome them. The ability to do so is a pedagogical matter of decisive importance. However, the human quality, the good intentions, the example of altruistic lives that we find in the different groups of the movement are true sources of mental purification. They make people broaden their horizons and inspire individuals to elevate their lives in all countries where the Effort is present.

* Can the movement improve itself? Should it do so? No doubt.

* For its part, the small Independent Lodge of Theosophists must overcome its own mistakes.

* It is not up to the ILT to “correct the mistakes of the movement”. On the contrary: the Independent Lodge is deeply grateful to the movement as a whole for its positive achievements and helpful actions. When the ILT points out some mistakes of the movement, it does so because it trusts in its future. The ILT knows that the theosophical movement is deeply alive. It learns from experience and dialogue, both of which include contrast. Therefore bureaucratic divisions within the movement should not be taken too seriously.

* In any situation, pointing out others’ faults with too much emphasis can be an escape from the duty to face one’s own failures. Bearing witness, speaking the truth, and clarifying the facts are important actions that prepare a better future, provided one does not exaggerate.

* Through all its ups and downs, since the 19th century, the theosophical movement has been a source of blessings for the countries where it is present. It has helped thousands of people who come into contact with it around the world. As time passes, the movement gradually learns from its mistakes. It achieves this by remaining loyal to its high ideal and by strengthening its inner unity with the victory of the spiritual soul.

* Each theosophical group and lodge does its best, and this is good. Each one is their own judge. For my part, as an individual, the task is the same as that of any theosophist. It consists, above all, of overcoming my own mistakes, trying to live as much as possible up to my ideal, and wishing the best to everyone in each situation. I must say thanks to every group and line of thought in the esoteric movement, and to every well-meaning religion and philosophy around the world, for, one way or another, I benefit from them all.

* I’m proud to be one of the founders of the Independent Lodge of Theosophists, which has existed since 2016. I’m personally indebted and deeply grateful to the United Lodge of Theosophists, the Pasadena Theosophical Society, the Adyar Theosophical Society, and other

theosophical organizations. Each of them benefits humanity. I believe in the rule of “one for all and all for one”.

(Carlos Cardoso Aveline)

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Examine the thematic section [Theosophical Movement – Its Past and Its Future.](#)

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Psychological Insights Of Jewish Mysticism

A Talk at Adath Israel, Merion, Philadelphia, January 12, 1986

Steven H. Levy



It is indeed a pleasure to return to the Synagogue - in fact the room where I received much of my formal Hebrew education - to share with you a few of the psychological insights of the Jewish Mystics. We might start out with a definite statement - and that is that I am not a scholar of Jewish mysticism nor am I a Jewish Mystic.

But in the course of my training and career in psychiatry and medicine, I have asked and been asked some of those nagging age old questions, such as: “Who am I? Why am I here? Why

does all this suffering come on me? What's my purpose? Sometimes life seems no more than a roller coaster with periods of suffering followed by a few moments of happiness." These are questions from individuals searching for meaning; individuals who do not necessarily lack any material benefit; they have friends; they have social status; they have wealth and yet they are still searching for the answers to those questions and meaning in their lives.

In the course of my searching for the answers to those questions and others, I came across the teachings of Jewish mysticism. It occurred to me that within those teachings there are some very profound and very interesting psychological insights into the nature of the human condition. It is also interesting to note that the psychologists of our century have discovered these same truths about human nature. So, I'm not bringing to you anything original, but rather I've gathered together a few of those basic ideas and insights and I'm presenting them to you in the hope that they might be useful to you.

Although the Jewish mystical tradition seems obscure, it has gathered to it much interest among the general public and scholars. If numbers of books are any indication, Jewish mysticism is currently enjoying a renaissance. The writings of Saul Bellow, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Victor Frankl and Martin Buber have attracted much interest among Jewish and non-Jewish readers. I think that the reason that Jewish mysticism has gained so much interest lately is that people are beginning to rediscover some of those psychological insights so appealing in today's world.

Jewish mysticism is systemitized in writings which are called the Kabbalah. The word Kabbalah means - that which has been received or passed down. According to the kabbalistic tradition, Kabbalah has the same divine origin as the Torah. It was revealed to Adam, Abraham and even to Moses on Mt. Sinai. In fact, the kabbalists teach that if one were to study the Torah, with an understanding of the numerical values of the various letters and understood the keys with which to interpret them, then one would have the understanding of the hidden side or esoteric side of Jewish tradition. Kabbalah is an aspect of Judaism which is as old as Judaism itself and has been passed down from one generation to another.

The question arises as to what is mysticism? Mystics search within themselves for that principle or that aspect of their consciousness by which they can know the Divine. For the average human being, religious experience is a matter of intellectual understanding and faith. Mysticism involves this, but it also involves the searching within. Much of the discipline, the ethics and the meditation of the mystic are for the purpose of raising one's own awareness and consciousness of that principle within. William James, the famous psychologist of the last century, recognized that the mystical aspect was common to all the religious experience - an inner feeling that there must be something divine within oneself and within nature. Most individuals may not be aware of the systematic teachings of the mystics or the particular disciplines. In that aspect it is mystical to us, or hidden.

Jewish Mysticism is based upon centuries of observations into human nature, and includes philosophical concepts. These include the nature of the human being, the relationship between the different departments of nature, and of course the place of the human being in the universe.

The psychologists and mystics recognized that the human mind has a tendency to define things in terms of shapes and of conditions. If somebody tells us about something which is unfamiliar, we try to understand it in terms of something we already know. It's a way of

coming into relationship with it - of understanding it. But when it comes to the Ultimate Source of Life, that is something that seems to elude definition. No matter how much we try to define IT, IT continues to elude our investigation. In the view of Jewish mysticism, trying to give this Supreme Source a shape or a condition - or saying it is this thing or that - is a fruitless endeavor; unless one were doing it from a symbolical or poetical point of view. Recognizing this, the name they gave to The Supreme Source was Ein Soph, which meant "No Thing".

I am going to read you a beautiful poem by Rabbi Ibn Gabirol, written in the 11th century, that later became a part of the Kol Nidre service. It illustrates the Rabbi's appreciation for this principle.

*"Thou art one, the root of all numbers, not as an
element of numeration; for unit admits not of
multiplication, change or form.*

*Thou art one, and in the secret of Thy unity the wisest
of men are lost, because they know it not.*

*Thou art one, and Thy unity is never diminished,
never extended, and cannot be changed.*

*Thou art one, and no thought of mine can fix for Thee
a limit, or define Thee.*

*Thou art one, but not as one existent, for the
understanding and vision of mortals cannot attain to
Thy existence, nor determine Thee the where, the how and the why...."*

The best that can be said of this Oneness is that it is eternal, infinite and changeless and not separate from any aspect of life; because if it were absent for a moment, or could be affected for a moment; it would cease to be changeless, eternal and infinite. We might try to familiarize ourselves with this concept by thinking of the idea of space. No matter how far you think and extend your mind in all directions trying to comprehend space, there is more space beyond. No matter how many objects you may place in space, there is space within the objects and there is space outside of the objects; space is not affected by the objects in it. In the same way that One Principle could be no less than space.

We may recognize this about the Oneness, but few realize the psychological implication of this that the mystics recognized, and tried to pass on - that this principle, the spiritual core of nature, was everywhere present and was in the human being, as well. And they gave a name to this higher part of the human being. They called it Ruach, or Spirit. Think of soul, that inner invisible compelling aspect of our nature that we can't see when we look in the mirror, but know exists. Ruach is the highest spiritual aspect of Soul. The lower part of our soul that is under the influence of passions, they called Nefesh.

The mystics had an understanding of this basic human condition which our psychologists in the 20th century are beginning to recognize. They saw that there is not only the lower instinctive, driving personal nature, but also the higher spiritual nature. They recognized that the battleground, is within the mind of the individual Neshamah, the Thinker, the Soul.

It is interesting that some of the theories of the greatest psychologists of the 20th century are including again and again that which the Jewish mystics have known for thousands of years. For example, Adler, the first psychologist to break away from the materialistic theories of Freud, spoke of the “social feeling” as evident of the spiritual nature. He didn’t mean only the feeling of harmony and kinship one has with his family, but he extended it to other human beings and to all nature. Otto Rank said that human beings have within themselves an unquenchable desire to live in the immortal and to be immortal.

Maslow spoke of the higher needs that the human being had to fulfill. Just as Freud said that if physical drives were repressed, it would lead to all sorts of illness, Maslow said there are higher drives that must be fulfilled. Jung, one of the best-known 20th century psychiatrists, recognized that the self is the spiritual center and is the spiritual potency for everything we do. It is reflected in our language when we say “I”, meaning that unchanging self, “I did this - I said that”. Everything seems to come forth from that self. The mystics said what some psychologists are now saying, that there is the lower aspect and there is that higher unchanging aspect - the unchanging sense of identity, that hasn’t changed from the moment we first remember, as children until today. Although our personality changes and our appearance changes, though our values and our desires change, there is something within ourselves that doesn’t change. The mystics had this basis from which they could counsel and inspire other individuals to recognize that there is a basis of self-reliance within themselves that no changing of conditions or change of circumstance can destroy.

Victor Frankl, the famous psychiatrist, developed the psychological theory of Logo Therapy or “Search for Meaning”. He went through the experience of the concentration camps. He stated that even when everything was taken away, those individuals who found meaning had fallen back on their own inner strength. That is what the mystics were saying. If it was true then, it is true today. There is that unchanging self, that divine part that we can fall back on for strength. The purpose of the kabalistic master and rabbi was to try to help his students and disciples to recognize this in their lives.

It’s interesting that the rabbi and kabalist Hillel was once asked by an impatient student to be taught the whole Torah while the student was standing on one foot, a challenge even for Hillel. Hillel stated, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, and the rest is commentary.” Now aside from the wit, Hillel was repeating a fundamental concept in Jewish mysticism. That concept is “the universality of law in nature”. This law that we see in nature is but an aspect of this divine principle.

We can see what the Jewish mystics meant by that law when one drops a pebble into the pond; the ripples go out and they come back to the center. And the ripples go back and forth again and again until harmony and balance are reestablished. Cause and effect create rippling until there is calm again on the surface of the water. The Golden Rule of Hillel when expressed in the terms of the physicist would state that for each action there is an equal and opposite reaction - Newton’s Third Law.

The Jewish mystics believed that the world one sees with the physical senses is a small part of the real world and is not the complete picture. They applied the basic law of cause and effect to the inner nature of the human being, including the moral nature and the psychological nature.

The tendency towards harmony and equilibrium can be seen in all the departments of nature. The mystics said this was evidence of divine will and compassion always trying to restore unity among the diverse elements in nature; always attempting to restore harmony. This was just a natural outgrowth of their fundamental idea that behind all the differences of human beings and human character, and behind all the differences in nature, there is an essential spiritual core which united all things to each other.

A human action ripples throughout nature, just like that pebble; and no thought - no gesture - no word - no deed can escape having an effect. Whenever anybody acts, he either maintains that harmony or he destroys it. By acting properly, and by following the mitzvahs, one is a co-worker with the divine, helping to maintain that divine harmony. Whenever one performs some act that goes against harmony, and performs some act that disturbs the harmony, either through ignorance or passion, all of nature reacts in an attempt to try to restore the individual to proper action.

Our suffering is a result of our own action and our joys are also an aspect of our own action. This same insight into the sources of human suffering is recognized by psychologists and analysts. People come to them complaining about all the miseries in their life; "It's this person's fault - it's that person's fault - it's my mother's fault." Bit by bit, the analyst tries to get the complainer to express all the different things that he has done in his life. He tries to develop an insight by the sufferer about the way he has acted; an insight into his responsibility for his problems. There is an attempt by the mystics, too, to help human beings recognize their responsibility and dignity.

If, through the law of action and reaction, one causes his problems, one cannot help but improve his life if he sets up better causes. Those who perfect themselves in the performance of all the mitzvahs united themselves with the divine.

This perfection cannot be obtained at once. They had some very interesting, profound thoughts on that matter. Apparently the individual has to go through certain experiences again and again until he learns from them. The soul is brought back to situations for the purpose of rectifying past errors, for perfecting itself. Death is not escape. The Jewish kabalist, interestingly enough, taught that the soul reincarnates again and again in order to reach this kind of understanding and strength. These are the words of Rabbi Simeon Ben Yochai, who was a sage attributed to have first written down the oral kabalistic traditions of the Zohar.

"All souls are subject to the trials of transmigration: and people do not know the designs of the Most High with regard to them; they know not how they are being at all times judged, both before coming into this world and when they leave it. They do not know how many transformations and mysterious trials they must undergo... They must re-enter the absolute substance whence they have emerged. But to accomplish this end they must develop all the perfections, the germ of which is planted in them; and if they have not fulfilled this condition during one life, they must commence another, a third and so forth, until they have acquired the condition which fits them for reunion with God."

The mystics applied this doctrine of cycles within a life, a concept which the psychologists now recognize - that our problems are very often replayings of early experiences of childhood - but the mystics even extended it into past lives. If there are problems for which one cannot find the causes in this life, the mystics attributed those problems to causes set up previously, in other lives. But what value does that idea of reincarnation have for us? Well, it permits us

to expand our horizons, and our hope. The word that they had for these transmigrations, or these revolutions of the soul, was “soul wandering”. They often likened it to the wandering of the Jew. Apparently at a certain time in Jewish history, when there was very little stability, just as hope is engendered by saying, “Next year in Jerusalem”, the Jewish mystics would try to teach that there was always another opportunity - that hope springs eternal.

The question comes up, “What then is the whole purpose? If the soul starts out from the divine and ends up one with the divine, why then all the struggle in between?” Based upon the fundamental idea of a spiritually divine core within the human being, the mystics said that man is essentially perfectible. They said that one can always do better; there is no situation so hopeless for the human beings that they cannot draw upon their own faculties and overcome in time. Being perfectible and bringing those soul powers into play human beings can perfect nature - they can lift it up. I think there is probably no finer, no nobler vision of the potentiality and purpose of the human being than this quote from Gershom Scholem who died in 1982. Gershom Scholem was the most preeminent scholar on Jewish mysticism and probably single-handedly turned around the general public and also scholarly attitudes toward this Jewish tradition of mysticism and gave it respectability. Listen to these words.

“If the human being is capable of plunging to indescribable depths of depravity, he also has the capacity, when he fulfills his true destiny, of rising even above the angelic realms. No angel has that potential power to restore the worlds which has been granted Man.”

“At opposite poles, both Man and God encompass within their being the entire Cosmos. What exists seminally in God unfolds and develops in Man. God contains all by virtue of being its creator and initiator in whom everything is rooted and all potency is hidden. Man’s role to complete this process takes place by being the agent through whom all the powers of creation are fully activated.”

“Man is the perfecting agent in the structure of the cosmos... He is also the ‘transformer’ who through his own life and deeds amplifies these forces to their highest level of manifestation and redirects them to their original source.”

“The crucial turning point in this cycle takes place at the moment he begins to develop an awareness of his own true essence and yearns to retrace the path from the multiplicity of his Nature to the Oneness from which he originated.”

We might stop and mention that even though the writer is using “man”, it applies to “women” as well. The soul, according to the mystics is sexless; that which is being said of man, in a literal sense, applies equally well to women.

Recognizing that we are a complex being, having all these lower aspects and having all the troubles within our society which reflect all the troubles within human nature, the mystics said you can’t escape the responsibility given you, but there is hope. The mystics were saying, *you have this spiritual center to fall back upon*. If you choose to recognize it, and begin the struggle step by step, collectively or individually, you can change things for the better in time. There is a certain sect of Jewish mystics who would always end a philosophical and theoretical discussion with a question in Hebrew, “**U’V’chane?**” - “**And so?**” It was a way to ask people what they were going **to do** about all those theories in a practical way.

If we look around our society today, everything is changing. Systems, traditions and institutions, whether they be in science or in society are all changing. People are looking for real values; they are looking for something real in their religion. Perhaps that is why there is such a return to religion in the past years. The mystics were saying something else, "Return and look for that which is real within you." Because everything else can be taken away - your synagogue - your family - your house - the things you love - the things you hate. But that self, that identity is still there. Never forget it!

Recognize that there is a tremendous power to overcome those things that pull us in so many directions. If you doubt that, then the next time you are pulled to do something that you shouldn't do, think about that changeless self within. Take the position of the self, the unchanging identity; look at life as you would a movie, as an observer. Witness how that position gives you a calmer basis with which to judge.

You need not accept all the philosophical implications of the teachings of the mystics, but consider how they were able to recognize basic truths about ourselves. Our modern psychologists are beginning to take these truths to children in classes on death and dying, to elderly people trying to give them hope, and to prisoners also trying to give them hope.

We'll conclude, not with a definite statement, but with a question - **U'V'chane?** And so?

Are there any questions or comments that you would like to ask?

QUESTION: I would have expected your presentation by a rabbi; it's a rabbinical type of presentation. It's surprising that it comes from a psychiatrist, but I appreciate it because of its insight.

What is the difference as far as you are concerned between Jewish mysticism and Jewish religion, as you understand it, which I gather is different than mysticism?

DR. LEVY: I'm going to address myself to your introductory comment first. The role of the psychiatrist and the rabbi traditionally was one. It was not surprising to find the rabbi in the role of the psychiatrist; the role of helping people with their mental and emotional difficulties goes back even to the priests, to the Chohans. After all, the word "psyche" means soul. As one witty observer once said, psychiatry first lost its soul and then lost its mind.

So many contributions have come from psychologists and psychiatrists in the 20th century, that we can no longer say that we are entirely conditionable and we're entirely animal. There is something divine - something human - something spiritual within ourselves. The psychiatrist can no longer deny that any more than the medical doctor can deny there is a heartbeat.

What is the difference between Jewish mysticism and traditional Judaism? Perhaps a scholar could answer this more thoroughly than I; but as I understand it, our Jewish tradition is both written and oral. It comes from the Torah, the Five Books of Moses and it comes from the oral transmissions of the rabbis. Interestingly enough, many of the rabbis with whom we equate traditional Judaism, were also mystics, such as Maimonides, Hillel and Nachmanoides.

They had training and exposure to the mystical side and incorporated it into their discussions; at times the two traditions came together. I think the main difference is that the mystic, in addition to praying and observing the practices of Judaism, also tried to search within himself for the mystical and hidden element within nature. In addition to the psychological self-searching, there was a very definite moral discipline. The exercises, the meditations and the chants were all for the purpose of elevating one's awareness to this intuition of the divine presence. For example, the Hasidic Jews were mystics; their singing and chanting were meant to elevate their awareness.

QUESTION: I am not knowledgeable about the subject of this program, but I would have thought that religious mysticism is about miracles.

DR. LEVY: The comment is that an individual who is not familiar with mysticism might think that mysticism represents something supernatural, such as miracles. The mystics did apply the law of cause and effect to all departments of nature, and they really didn't believe in miracles. What we would call a miracle, they called the operation of laws of nature that one didn't understand. However, the mystics in the course of trying to unite oneself consciously with the divine, and of trying to open up these capacities within themselves did find some extraordinary human qualities.

For example, there is a line of mystical teachers who were very psychic and developed intuitive knowledge. There is a story by Martin Buber, who tells of a community where there lived a rabbi who was a great seer. The rabbi had the ability to read what the person had been through in his past life in the creases in the forehead. One day the rabbi was called away, and he placed a student of his in this job; the student had never done this before. Then, the first person came to him and he didn't know what to expect. All of a sudden there came to his mind's eye the scene of a shipwreck, and from there he was able to take it further.

This story illustrates a belief in the special powers among certain members of the Jewish community that was very prevalent at one time. People went to these specially trained rabbis and it was accepted to do so. The idea that there are special psychic powers is really not too astounding today. I think the interesting thing about it is that the whole mystical tradition in Judaism seems to be so obscure; we don't hear about it very much.

QUESTION: In quite a different way, without using psychiatry, how can we peel away the layers to get to our inner strength?

DR. LEVY: A very good question - and it's interesting that you use the word "peel". One of the instructions of the mystics was to shave, to peel away the layers of our complex nature until we get back to that part of us that we cannot peel off anymore. We start from the outermost part of us - the physical body. The physical body is constantly changing, it's not the same for a moment and it changes every 7 years. It is taught in medicine that in the cells there is a complete rejuvenation every 7 years. We don't have the same cells that we had 7 years ago. The body's shape and its configuration, although it is relatively the same, doesn't appear the same as it appeared as an infant. It is constantly changing; and some days you look in the mirror and you don't look the same as you did yesterday. Peel the body away because that's a changeable part and what is left.

I believe we're insightful enough to recognize we have very strong feelings of anger, hope, love, conflict and passion. We have a very subtle inner life and often live in that life, especially when we are bored when we have all kinds of interesting fancies and imaginations. These are a very important and a real part of our life. The artist, especially, lives in the inner

life. Very often the artist will go without food for days, completely denying the needs of the body, because that inner life is so compelling to him or to her for the moment. We don't always feel the same way; we don't feel about the same things the same way from moment to moment. We may be very hard headed on a particular point at one time, but years later through a lot of suffering we come to have a different attitude toward things; our feelings are all changeable. What is left when we peel those feelings away?

We all think and we use our mind to figure out mathematical problems. We solve problems with our families and we have very definite ideas about what is right and wrong. We have a whole body of knowledge and a whole body of experience; sometimes that experience completely changes because somebody presents us some new aspect. Well, our mind changes, too, so let's peel that away, since we're trying to find that which is changeless.

If we're not the physical body, although we have one, and if we're not those passions, although we have them, and if we're not those opinions and ideas, although we have them, well what are we? That's the Identity Crisis. We find that there is one thing we can always say we are throughout all the changes of the body, of the desires, of the feelings, of the personality, of the occupations, we still have the same unchanging sense of identity - "I am I." What was it that Moses was told when he asked, "Lord who shall I say sent me, what are Thou called?" What was he told? "I am that I am."

QUESTION: Jewish mysticism believes in transmigration of the soul, reincarnation. Is there a parallel between that belief and that of the oriental religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism that believe in reincarnation until a certain perfection of the soul is achieved? Is there a parallel or if not a common thread?

DR. LEVY: Some of the fundamental ideas of the mystics regardless of the religion, are the same. Regardless of the religions the mystics practiced, when they looked within they saw a human being and the same human nature, so necessarily some of their fundamental ideas, observations and conclusions of human nature were the same. Yet there are some differences within the theory of Jewish mysticism which differ from Buddhistic mysticism or Hindu mysticism. There are also some remarkable similarities.

It is very interesting that it is our differences that make life interesting, but it is also true that our differences are often the source of a lot of misunderstanding and through the years this misunderstanding has contributed to religious persecution and wars.

If we began to look at our various religions from a comparative point of view, also comparing the mystical side, we can see that there are certain fundamental concepts in all the religions that are the same. That way we have the basis for understanding each other's religion and ethics. The Golden Rule of Hillel is repeated in all the different religions in various ways.

The Golden Rule is a fundamental law of life that psychologists are today beginning to recognize what people have known all along. Psychologists ask why one feels good after doing good? The behaviorists say that if one does good, he feels better because that appeals to his selfish nature; people like to feel better so they do good to get pleasure from it. The sociobiologists would say that people do good, because now the genes are going to survive. If everybody does good to each other, the genes are going to survive and humanity will go on, and that's why there is good feeling. Regardless of the explanation, whether it's the mystical or the behavioral or the purely materialist of the scientist, we can't help deny the fact that if

one works in harmony with others in a relationship, there is a better feeling within oneself, and unity among people. These truths underlie all the religions.

QUESTION: Your comments about peeling layers reminds me of a course in Zen Buddhism that I was required to take when I was in college. In that course, the instructor asked where we were if we were to start chopping off pieces of our body and put our severed arm outside the room. Are we out there or are we in here? If we continued that so that all the parts were out there but we still felt in here, where are we? It was a similar kind of process with the self.

DR. LEVY: We're trying to present to you a view of life and oneself. We tend to rush by life. Admittedly, we're all taken up with the demands of physical existence. We need to provide for our families, we have to make a living, and we even worship in a very organized fashion, at times. But few of us take the time to look within and discover some of the truths about ourselves. One of the first truths we very easily recognize is that we can lose every part of our body and still have the sense of identity.

You may be familiar with books such as "Life After Life" or "Near Death Experiences". These books contain accounts of people who have been pronounced dead and then later revived. To the amazement of everybody they recounted the experience of how they were floating above their body. They saw what the doctors were doing and they could recount the conversations they heard. They all reported a certain feeling of being attracted to a light within. Do you know, that those exact same descriptions are found in the Jewish mystical tradition and literature? The mystics described the various stages a dying person goes through. When you compare what there is in the Zohar and what is in the modern books by the doctors you'll find great similarities.

Those mystics didn't have to die to get their knowledge; they weren't in car accidents and later resuscitated. Some of them must have had that ability to get out of their bodies and observe what was going on.

It's very interesting to see that there are aspects of our religion that are immediately practical in a psychological way and that can be confirmed by science, and that there is a certain blending of the two. There is certain part of science which can confirm religion and there is a certain part of religion that is very scientific and based on law. It helps us to integrate these two very important aspects of our lives. The sincerely devoutly religious person does not want to think his religious life is one thing and that reason, law and science are something else. He wants to see the whole thing blended into a meaningful whole.

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Steven H. Levy, M.D., is a psychiatrist, a lifelong North American theosophist, and an associate of the United Lodge of Theosophists (ULT). Based in Philadelphia, he is a contributor to **The Aquarian Theosophist** and a member of the "[E-Theosophy](#)" Google Group. [[Click here to read more by this author.](#)]

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[The Russian Edition of *The Fire and Light*](#)

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The Daily Practice of the Fathers of the Desert – 02

**Questions and Answers of the Greek
Fathers, Selected and Translated from
Greek into Latin by Paschasius of Dumium**

(Interrogationes et responsiones Graecorum patrum)

Paschasius of Dumium
(Editor, Translator)



**St. Anthony the Abbot and St. Paul the First Hermit:
a painting by David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690)**

Editorial Note:

(CCA)

Chapter 6

2. Some brothers went to Abbot Antony and asked to hear from him words by which they might be saved. He said to them: “You have heard the Scriptures, and you know what is sufficient to you from Christ.” But they insisted that he agree to tell them something. Then he said to them: “The Gospel says: ‘If someone strike thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also’.” But they said they could not do this. The old man answered: “You cannot offer the other cheek? Then let him strike the same one again if he wants.” But when they insisted they could not even do this, the old man said to them: “If you cannot do this, then do not return evil for what you have received.” When they repeated the same words as before, Abbot Antony said to his disciple: “Go and prepare some food for them to eat, for you see that they are terribly weak.” And he said to them: “If you cannot do this and do not want to do the other, what do you expect from me? As I see it, you need prayer to cure your infirmity.”

Chapter 7

1. One of the brothers was wronged by another and went to Abbot Sisoïus and explained the nature of the insult, adding: "I want to avenge myself." The old man asked him to leave vengeance to God, but he repeated: "I shall not desist until I really get revenge." Abbot Sisoïus said to him: "Since you have put this thought in your mind, at least let us pray." And the old man arose and began to pray in these words: "O God, we no longer have need that Thou be anxious for us, since we ourselves, as this brother says, will and can be avenged." When the brother heard this, he prostrated himself at the feet of the old man and prayed for forgiveness, promising that he would never again quarrel with him against whom he was angry.

2. One brother was wronged by another and went and told an old man. The old man replied: "Let your thoughts be satisfied, for your brother does not want you to be wronged, but your sins compel him. In every temptation that comes to you from a man, do not find fault with him, but merely say: 'Because of my sins these things happen to me'."

3. Abbot Pimenius used to say frequently: "Ill will never overcomes ill will. If anyone does ill to you, return good to him, that by your goodness you may conquer his ill will."

4. There was a certain brother who, the more anyone wronged him or stirred him up, the more he would run back to him saying: "These are the ones who offer us a chance to perfect ourselves, but 'they that call us blessed, the same deceive us, and destroy the way of our steps'."

5. There was another old man who, if someone criticized him, would if he was close by go and reward him in person, or if he was further away would send him presents.

Chapter 8

1. A certain brother asked Abbot Sisoïus: "If robbers or barbarians should attack me and try to kill me, but I should get the better of them, would you tell me to kill them?" He answered: "Don't do it; don't even mention homicide, but trust everything to God; if anything adverse happens to you, admit that it comes to you because of your sins; if anything good occurs, you should ascribe it all to God's dispensation."

2. There was a great hermit called Athabeos who lived in the mountain, and robbers came upon him; he raised a loud cry and other brothers hastened from the surroundings and seized the robbers. They were passed on to the city, where the judge put them in prison. Now the brothers were extremely sad that the robbers had been punished on their account, and they went to Abbot Pimenius and told him what had happened. He wrote to the hermit, saying: "Remember the first betrayal and its source and then you will see the second betrayal. For unless you had been betrayed from within yourself, you never would have perpetrated this second betrayal." When he heard these words, he had compassion, and although he was well known in that region for being one who had not left his cell for a long time, he arose and went to the city and removed the robbers from prison and publicly set them free.

Chapter 9

1. Someone seeing a man laboriously carrying a dead man on a couch said to him: "Do you carry the dead? If you would improve, carry the living, 'for the peacemakers shall be called children of God'."
2. When some of the brothers asked Abbot Moses for a talk, he urged his disciple Zacharia to say something to them. The latter placed his cloak under his feet and trod upon it and said: "Unless one has been thus trod upon, one cannot become a monk."
3. The blessed Antony prophesied much to Abbot Ammon, saying: "You have far to advance in the fear of God." And he took him out of the cell and showed him a stone and said to him: "Go and do harm to that stone and beat it mercilessly." When he had done this, St. Antony asked him whether the stone had answered him back. He replied: "No." Abbot Antony said to him: "You too will arrive at this same measure, that you think no harm is being done to you."

Chapter 10

1. Abbot Motois built himself a monastery in a place called Heracleon. Being troubled by many things, he moved to another place and similarly built himself another monastery there. But through the devil's envy there was one brother who was always angry with him; for this reason, he arose and returned to his own village and made a monastery there and shut himself up inside. After some time the brothers from the place which he had left gathered, and took with them the brother with whom he had quarreled, to ask him to return to his monastery. When they had come to the vicinity, they left their goatskins and the brother in one place and went on to the old man. When they knocked on the door, he opened the window and looked out and recognized them. After a prayer, Abbot Motois said to them: "Where are your goatskins?" They answered: "Over there nearby with the brother who was angry with you." When the old man heard this and recognized the name and knew that he had come, he was so delighted that he took an axe and chopped down the door by which he had shut himself up; he went out and ran to the place where the brother was, and was the first to ask forgiveness; he embraced him and brought him into his cell and feasted with them for three days, though it never had been his custom to break his fast; and he arose and returned with them.
2. A brother asked Abbot Elias: "If I make anyone sad, how shall I ask his pardon?" The old man answered: "From the bottom of your heart and in sadness do penance before him, and God will see your purpose and satisfy him."

Chapter 11

1. Abbot Arsenius said: "If an unbaked brick is placed in a foundation close to a river, it will not stand up even one day; but if it is well baked, it will remain like stone. Just so a man who is not baked and inflamed (as it was said of Joseph: 'The word of the Lord inflamed him'), such a man is soon dissolved at the start of thoughts of the flesh."
2. The same was asked by another brother: "If I sin, even the smallest sin, and my thought consumes me and accuses me, saying: 'Why do you sin?', what must I do?" The old man answered: "In whatever hour man falls into sin and says from his heart: 'Lord God, I have sinned; forgive me', the destructive force of his thought or despair will soon cease."

3. Abbot Pimenius used to say of Abbot Isidore that only he understood himself. For when his thought would say to him: "You are great", he would answer himself: "As great as Antony, or even Abbot Piamon, or the rest of the brothers who pleased God?" Whenever he had these thoughts, he would be at ease. When the devil, to torment him, threatened despair and punishment, saying: "After all of this you are going to go to tortures", he answered: "Although I may be sent to tortures, still I shall find you beneath me."

4. Wicked spirits often appeared to Abbot Moses, saying: "You have conquered us and we can do nothing to you; for whenever we wish to humble you with despair, you are exalted; and when you exalt yourself, you are so humble that none of us can approach you."

5. When a certain brother frequently used these words to Abbot Sisoïus: "What shall I do, father, for I have fallen?", he answered: "Arise." And he arose. And again, he claimed that he had fallen. The old man said: "Arise again." When the brother kept saying frequently that he had fallen, the old man would use the same words, exclaiming: "Don't stop getting up, son." The brother asked him: "Father, explain how far I can arise." The old man said: "The extent of your fall depends on whether you are found in good works or in bad. For in whatever work a man is found, so he shall be judged."

6. He also said: "He who labors and thinks he is accomplishing something already has his reward."

Chapter 12

1. A certain brother asked Abbot Pimenius if it were better to live with the other brothers or apart from them. The old man replied: "If a man reproaches himself, he can exist anywhere; but if he exalts himself, he stands nowhere, as it is written: 'If anyone thinks himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceives himself.' For whatever a man does for another, he should not exult over it, as he will soon lose it."

2. If anyone wished to listen to Abbot Macarius in fear as of a holy man, he would be suspected and receive no reply at all from the old man. On the other hand, if anyone appeared to hate him and attacked him thus: "Abbot Macarius, when you were a camel driver and used to steal nitre, didn't you get beaten by your masters when you were caught stealing?", he would gladly and joyfully respond to whatever was asked of him.

3. While Abbot Nesteron was walking with other brothers in the desert, they saw a serpent and ran away. One of them said to him: "Are you afraid too, father?" The old man replied: "I am not afraid, son, but I had to run away, for otherwise I should not have escaped vainglorious thoughts."

4. On one occasion, a brother from Egypt came to Abbot Zeno in Syria and began to criticize his own thoughts in the presence of the old man, who, when he heard, remarked in surprise: "The Egyptians conceal the virtues which they have and make public the vices which they do not have, while the Syrians and Greeks boast of the virtues which they do not have and hide the vices which they do have."

5. One old man went to another old man and said: “I am dead to this world.” The other remarked: “Do not boast, for even though you may say: ‘I am dead’, the devil still is not dead and he has countless wicked arts.”

6. When Abbot Sisoïus was sitting in the presence of another brother, he became carried away with his thoughts and, without realizing it, sighed in the other’s hearing. He began to be sorry and said: “Forgive me, brother, please; I no longer remember that I am a monk when I sigh in another’s hearing.” Whenever this same old man stood in prayer, he lifted his hands toward heaven, then quickly lowered them if another was present, lest this be imputed to him for praise.

7. An old man lived in the lower regions of Egypt and sat quietly. One pious layman served his needs. Now, it happened that the son of the layman fell ill. With many entreaties, he begged the old man to go to his house and offer prayer for the child. The old man arose and walked with him, but the layman ran ahead and entered his house and said: “Come to meet the anchorite.” When the old man saw them coming from a distance with torches, he realized that they were coming to him, and he immediately took off his clothes and threw them into a river and started to wash them, standing naked. The one who ministered to him was ashamed of the sight and said to the men: “Let us return, for our old man has lost his senses.” And he went to him and said: “Father, what is this that you have done? All who have seen you said: ‘The old man is possessed by a demon’.” He replied: “That is what I wanted to hear.”

8. Again, on another occasion, one of the judges wanted to see Simon, and clerics went ahead and told him: “Get ready, father, for a judge who has heard of your works is coming to you, hoping to receive a benediction from you.” He replied: “I shall do it; I shall get ready.” So he put on his sleeveless shirt and took bread and cheese in his hands and went to the door and sat down with his legs spread out and started to eat. When the judge arrived with his officials and saw him, he said: “Is this the anchorite about whom we have heard such things?” And he had no regard for him and departed.

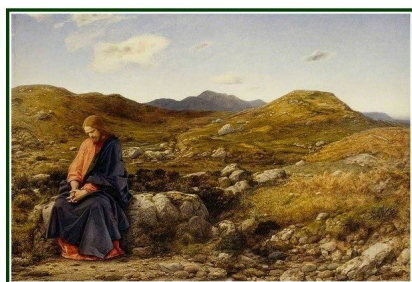
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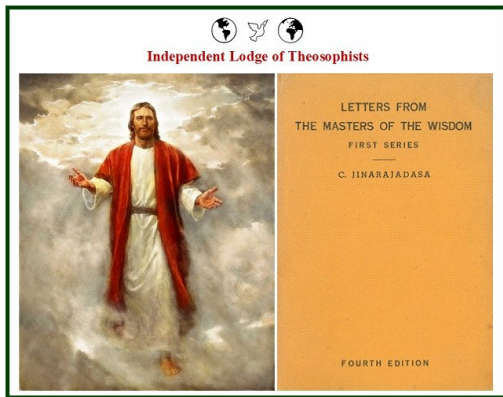
See also the text “**Sayings of the Egyptian Fathers**”, which was published in two parts at the editions of [June 2026](#) and [July 2026](#) of **The Aquarian Theosophist**.

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Read more:



* [Jesus, a Sage Who Lived in the Desert](#), by H. P. Blavatsky.



* [The Mahatmas and Christianity.](#)

* [Do Theosophists Fight Demons?](#)

* Examine the thematic section on [Christianity and Esoteric Philosophy.](#)

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Independent Lodge of Theosophists

“A group or branch, however small, cannot be a theosophical Society - unless all the members in it are magnetically bound to each other, by the same way of thinking at least in some one direction ...”.

H P Blavatsky

Image reproduced from the original manuscript of Letter C (100) in “Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett”, TUP, Pasadena, California, USA, p. 222:

a group or branch however small, cannot be a theosophical Society - unless all the members in it are magnetically bound to each other, by the same way of thinking at least in some one direction

(The founders of the Independent Lodge obtained from the British Library a complete copy of the original of Letter 100)

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Consciousness, the Intelligible Triad - and a Pure Heart

Selected Fragments from “Isis Unveiled”

Helena P. Blavatsky



H.P. Blavatsky at work in 1887

1. Consciousness, a Quality of the Soul

Consciousness is a quality of the sentient principle, or, in other words, the soul; and the latter often displays activity even while the body is asleep or paralyzed. When we lift our arm mechanically, we may imagine that we do it unconsciously because our superficial senses cannot appreciate the interval between the formulation of the purpose and its execution. Latent as it seemed to us, our vigilant will evolved force, and set our matter in motion.

(From “[Isis Unveiled, Volume I](#)”, p. 199)

2. Occult Influences

It is especially in the countries unblessed with civilization that we should seek for an explanation of the nature, and observe the effects of that subtle power, which ancient philosophers called the “world’s soul”. In the East only, and on the boundless tracts of unexplored Africa, will the student of psychology find abundant food for his truth-hungering soul. The reason is obvious. The atmosphere in populous neighborhoods is badly vitiated by the smoke and fumes of manufactories, steam-engines, railroads, and steamboats, and especially by the miasmatic exhalations of the living and the dead. Nature is as dependent as a human being upon conditions before she can work, and her mighty breathing, so to say, can be as easily interfered with, impeded, and arrested, and the correlation of her forces destroyed in a given spot, as though she were a man. Not only climate, but also occult influences daily felt not only modify the physio-psychological nature of man, but even alter the constitution of so-called inorganic matter in a degree not fairly realized by European science.

(From “[Isis Unveiled, Volume I](#)”, pp. 210-211)

3. Body, Soul and Spirit

Three spirits live and actuate man, [...] three worlds pour their beams upon him; but all three only as the image and echo of one and the same all-constructing and uniting principle of production. The first is the spirit of the elements (terrestrial body and vital force in its brute condition); the second, the spirit of the stars (sidereal or astral body – the soul); the third is the *Divine* spirit (*Augoeides*).

(Paracelsus, quoted in “[Isis Unveiled, Volume I](#)”, p. 212)

4. The Intelligible Triad

Man is a little world – a microcosm inside the great universe. Like a foetus, he is suspended, by all his *three* spirits, in the matrix of the macrocosmos; and while his terrestrial body is in constant sympathy with its parent earth, his astral soul lives in unison with the sidereal *anima mundi*. He is in it, as it is in him, for the world-pervading element fills all space, and *is* space itself, only shoreless and infinite. As to his third spirit, the divine, what is it but an infinitesimal ray, one of the countless radiations proceeding directly from the Highest Cause – the Spiritual Light of the World? This is the trinity of organic and inorganic nature – the spiritual and the physical, which are three in one, and of which Proclus says that “The first monad is the Eternal God; the second, eternity; the third, the paradigm, or pattern of the universe”; the three constituting the Intelligible Triad. Everything in this visible universe is the outflow of this Triad, and a microcosmic triad itself. And thus they move in majestic procession in the fields of eternity, around the spiritual sun, as in the heliocentric system the celestial bodies move round the visible suns.

(From “[Isis Unveiled, Volume I](#)”, p. 212)

5. A Pure Heart

[...] From Pythagoras down to Eliphas Levi, from highest to humblest, every one teaches *that the magical power is never possessed by those addicted to vicious indulgences*. Only the pure in heart “see God”, or exercise divine gifts – only such can heal the ills of the body, and allow themselves, with relative security, to be guided by the “invisible powers”. Such only can give

(From **“Isis Unveiled, Volume I”**, p. 218)

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The above selection was made by Mr. Alex Rambla Beltrán, our coeditor from Spain.

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“...Nor can I, if I would be true to my life-pledge and vows, now live at the Headquarters from which the Masters and Their spirit are virtually banished. The presence of Their portraits will not help; They are a dead letter.”

Helena P. Blavatsky

From the text “**Why I Do Not Return to India**”, which is available at www.TheosophyOnline.com



Click to see ‘Why I Do Not Return to India’:

<https://www.carloscardosoaveline.com/why-i-do-not-return-to-india/>

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“Deserve, then desire”. (H. P. Blavatsky)

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The Aquarian Theosophist Volume XXVI, Number 12, October 2026.

A detailed illustration of a turtle, likely a pond turtle, resting on a patch of green grass. The turtle has a dark, patterned shell with yellow and orange markings. Its head is extended forward, and its legs are visible. The background is a soft, light blue wash, suggesting a pond or a misty environment.

www.HelenaBlavatsky.org. It was founded by Jerome Wheeler in November 2000.

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