

Occultism Versus The Occult Arts

by H.P. Blavatsky

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I oft have heard, but ne'er believed till now,
There are, who can by potent magic spells
Bend to their crooked purpose Nature's laws

Milton

In this month's "Correspondence" several letters testify to the strong impression produced on some minds by our last month's article, Practical Occultism. Such letters go far to prove and strengthen two logical conclusions.

(a) There are more well-educated and thoughtful men who believe in the existence of Occultism and Magic (the two differing vastly) than the modern materialist dreams of; and —

(b) that most of the believers (comprising many Theosophists) have no definite idea of the nature of Occultism, and confuse it with the Occult sciences in general, the "Black art" included.

Their representations of the powers it confers upon man, and of the means to be used to acquire them, are as varied as they are fanciful. Some imagine that a master in the art, to show the way, is all that is needed to become a Zanon. Others, that one has but to cross the Canal of Suez and go to India to bloom forth as a Roger Bacon or even a Count St. Germain. Many take for their ideal, Margrave with his ever-renewing youth, and care little for the soul as the price paid for it. Not a few, mistaking "Witch-of-Endorism", pure and simple, for Occultism — "through the yawning Earth from Stygian gloom, call up the meagre ghosts to walks of light", and want, on the strength of this feat, to be regarded as full-blown Adepts. "Ceremonial Magic", according to the rules mockingly laid down by Eliphas Levi, is another imagined *alter ego* of the philosophy of the Arhats of old. In short, the prisms through which Occultism appears, to those innocent of the philosophy, are as multicoloured and varied as human fancy can make them.

Will these candidates to Wisdom and Power feel very indignant if told the plain truth? It is not only useful, but it has now become *necessary* to disabuse most of them, and before it is too late. This truth may be

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said in a few words: There are not in the West half-a-dozen among the fervent hundreds who call themselves “Occultists” who have even an approximately correct idea of the nature of the science they seek to master. With a few exceptions, they are all on the highway to Sorcery. Let them restore some order in the chaos that reigns in their minds before they protest against this statement. Let them first learn the true relation in which the Occult Sciences stand to Occultism, and the difference between the two, and then feel wrathful if they still think themselves right. Meanwhile, let them learn that Occultism differs from Magic and other secret Sciences as the glorious sun does from a rush-light, as the immutable and immortal Spirit of Man — the reflection of the absolute, causeless and unknowable ALL — differs from the mortal clay — the human body.

In our highly civilised West, where modern languages have been formed, and words coined, in the wake of ideas and thoughts — as happened with every tongue, — the more the latter became materialised in the cold atmosphere of Western selfishness and its incessant chase after the goods of this world, the less was there any need felt for the production of new terms to express that which was tacitly regarded as absolute and exploded “superstition”. Such words could answer only to ideas which a cultured man was scarcely supposed to harbour in his mind. “Magic”, a synonym for jugglery; “Sorcery”, an equivalent for crass ignorance; and “Occultism”, the sorry relic of crack-brained, mediaeval Fire-philosophers, of the Jacob Boehmes and the St. Martins are expressions believed more than amply sufficient to cover the whole field to “thimble-rigging”. They are terms of contempt, and used generally only in reference to the dross and residues of the dark ages and its preceding aeons of paganism. Therefore have we no terms in the English tongue to define and shade the difference between such abnormal powers, or the sciences that lead to the acquisitions of them, with the nicety possible in the Eastern languages — pre-eminently the Sanskrit. What do the words “miracle” and “enchantment” (words identical in meaning after all, as both express the idea of producing wonderful things by *breaking the laws of nature*(!!) as explained by the accepted authorities) convey to the minds of those who hear, or who pronounce them? A Christian — “breaking of the laws of nature” notwithstanding — while believing firmly in the *miracles*, because said to have been produced by God through Moses, will either scout the enchantments performed by Pharaoh's magicians, or attribute them to the devil. It is the latter whom our pious enemies connect with Occultism, while their impious foes, the infidels, laugh at Moses, Magicians, and Occultists, and would blush to give one serious thought to such “superstitions”. This, because there is no term in existence to show the difference; no words to express the lights and shadows, and draw the line of demarcation between the sublime and the true, the absurd and the ridiculous. The latter are the theological interpretations which teach the “breaking of the laws of Nature” by man, God, or devil; the former — the *scientific* “miracles” and enchantments of Moses and the Magicians *in accordance with natural laws*, both having been learned in all the Wisdom of the Sanctuaries, which were the “Royal Societies” of those days — and in true OCCULTISM. This last word is certainly misleading, translated as it stands, from the compound word *Gupta-Vidya*, “Secret Knowledge”. But the knowledge of what? Some of the Sanskrit terms may help us.

There are four (out of the many other) names of the various kinds of Esoteric Knowledge or Sciences given, even in the exoteric Puranas. There is

(1) *Yajna-Vidya* knowledge [The *Yajna*], says the Brahmins, “exists from eternity, for it proceeded forth from the Supreme One...in whom it lay dormant from 'no beginning.' It is the key to the TRIVIDYA, the thrice sacred science contained in the Rig verses, which teaches the Yagus or sacrificial mysteries. 'The Yajna' exists as an invisible thing at all times; it is like the latent power of electricity in an electrifying machine, requiring only the operation of a suitable apparatus in order to be elicited. It is supposed to

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extend from the *Ahavaniya* or sacrificial fire to the heavens, forming a bridge or ladder by means of which the sacrificer can communicate with the world of gods and spirits, and even ascend when alive to their abodes". — Martin Haug's Aitareya Brahmana. "This *Yajna* is again one of the forms of the Akasa; and the mystic word calling it unto existence and pronounced mentally by the initiated Priest is the *Lost Word* receiving impulse through WILL POWER"—[Isis Unveiled", Vol. I, Intr.] of the occult powers awakened in nature by the performance of certain religious ceremonies and rites. (2) *Mahavidya*, the "great knowledge", the magic of the Kabalists and of the *Tantrika* worship, often Sorcery of the worst description. (3) *Guhya-Vidya*, knowledge of the mystic powers residing in Sound (Ether), hence in the Mantras (chanted prayers or incantations), and depending on the rhythm and melody used; in other words, a magical performance based on knowledge of the Forces of Nature and their correlation; and (4) ATMA-VIDYA, a term which is translated simply "Knowledge of the Soul", *true Wisdom* by the Orientalists, but which means far more.

This is the only kind of Occultism that any Theosophist who admires "Light on the Path", and who would be wise and unselfish, ought to strive after. All the rest is some branch of the "Occult Sciences", *i.e.*, arts based on the knowledge of the ultimate essence of all things in the Kingdoms of Nature — such as minerals, plants and animals — hence of things pertaining to the realm of *material* nature, however invisible that essence may be, and howsoever much it has hitherto eluded the grasp of Science. Alchemy, Astrology, Occult Physiology, Chiromancy, exist in Nature, and the *exact* Sciences — perhaps so called, because they are found in this age of paradoxical philosophies the reverse — have already discovered not a few of the secret of the above *arts*. But clairvoyance, symbolised in India as the "Eye of Siva", called in Japan, "Infinite Vision", is *not* Hypnotism, the illegitimate son of Mesmerism, and is not to be acquired by such arts. All the others may be mastered and results obtained, whether good, bad, or indifferent; but *Atma-Vidya* sets small value on them. It includes them all and may even use them occasionally, but it does so after purifying them of their dross, for beneficent purposes, and taking care to deprive them of every element of selfish motive. Let us explain: Any man or woman can set himself or herself to study one or all of the above specified "Occult Arts" without any great previous preparation, and even without adopting any too restraining mode of life. One could even dispense with any lofty standard of morality. In the last case, of course, ten to one the student would blossom into a very decent kind of sorcerer, and tumble down headlong into black magic. But what can this matter? The *Voodoos* and the *Dugpas* eat, drink, and are merry over hecatombs of victims of their infernal arts. And so do the amiable gentlemen vivisectionists and the *diploma-ed* "Hypnotisers" of the Faculties of Medicine; the only difference between the two classes being that the *Voodoos* and *Dugpas* are *conscious*, and the Charcot-Richet crew *unconscious*, Sorcerers. Thus, since both have to reap the fruits of their labours and achievements in the black art, the Western practitioners should not have the punishment and reputation without the profits and enjoyments they may get therefrom. For we say it again, *hypnotism* and *vivisection* as practiced in such Schools, are *Sorcery* pure and simple, *minus* a knowledge that the *Voodoos* and *Dugpas* enjoy, and which no Charcot-Richet can procure for himself in fifty years of hard study and experimental observation, Let, then, those who will dabble in magic, whether they understand its nature or not, but who find the rules imposed upon students too hard, and who, therefore, lay *Atma-Vidya* or Occultism aside — go without it. Let them become magicians by all means, even though they do become *Voodoos* and *Dugpas* for the next ten incarnations.

But the interest of our readers will probably centre on those who are invincibly attracted towards the "Occult", yet who neither realise the true nature of what they aspire towards, nor have they become passion-proof, far less, truly unselfish.

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How about these unfortunates, we shall be asked, who are thus rent in twain by conflicting forces? For it has been said too often to need repetition, and the fact itself is patent to any observer, that when once the desire for Occultism has really awakened in a man's heart, there remains for him no hope of peace, no place of rest and comfort in all the world. He is driven out into the wild and desolate spaces of life by an ever-gnawing unrest he cannot quell. His heart is too full of passion and selfish desire to permit him to pass the Golden Gate; he cannot find rest or peace in ordinary life. Must he then inevitably fall into sorcery and black magic, and through many incarnations heap up for himself a terrible Karma? Is there no other road for him?

Indeed there is, we answer. Let him aspire to no higher than he feels able to accomplish. Let him not take a burden upon himself too heavy for him to carry. Without ever becoming a "Mahatma", a Buddha or a Great Saint, let him study the philosophy and the "Science of Soul", and he can become one of the modest benefactors of humanity, without any "superhuman" powers. *Siddhis* (or the Arhat powers) are only for those who are able to lead the life, to comply with the terrible sacrifices required for such a training, and to comply with them *to the very letter*. Let them know at once and remember always, that *true Occultism* or *Theosophy* is the "Great Renunciation of SELF", unconditionally and absolutely, in thought as in action. It is ALTRUISM, and it throws him who practises it out of calculation of the ranks of the living altogether. "Not for himself, but for the world, he lives", as soon as he has pledged himself to the work. Much is forgiven during the first years of probation. But no sooner is he "accepted" than his personality must disappear, and he has to become *a mere beneficent force in Nature*. There are two poles for him after that, two paths, and no midway place of rest. He has either to ascend laboriously, step by step, often through numerous incarnations and *no Devachanic break*, the golden ladder leading to Mahatmaship (the *Arhat* or *Bodhisattva* condition), or — he will let himself slide down the ladder at the first false step, and roll down into *Dugpaship*...

All this is either unknown or left out of sight altogether. Indeed, one who is able to follow the silent evolution of the preliminary aspirations of the candidates often finds strange ideas quietly taking possession of their minds. There are those whose reasoning powers have been so distorted by foreign influences that they imagine that animal passions can be so sublimated and elevated that their fury, force, and fire can, so to speak, be turned inwards; that they can be stored and shut up in one's breast, until their energy is, not expanded, but turned toward higher and more holy purposes: namely, *until their collective and unexpanded strength enables their possessor to enter the true Sanctuary of the Soul* and stand therein in the presence of the *Master* — the HIGHER SELF. For this purpose they will not struggle with their passions nor slay them. They will simply, by a strong effort of will, put down the fierce flames and keep them at bay within their natures, allowing the fire to smoulder under a thin layer of ashes. They submit joyfully to the torture of the Spartan boy who allowed the fox to devour his entrails rather than part with it. Oh, poor blind visionaries!

As well hope that a band of drunken chimney-sweeps, hot and greasy from their work, may be shut up in a Sanctuary hung with pure white linen, and that instead of soiling and turning it by their presence into a heap of dirty shreds, they will become masters in and of the sacred recess, and finally emerge from it as immaculate as that recess. Why not imagine that a dozen of skunks imprisoned in the pure atmosphere of a *Dgon-pa* (a monastery) can issue out of it impregnated with all the perfumes of the incenses used?... Strange aberration of the human mind. Can it be so? Let us argue.

The "Master" in the Sanctuary of our souls is "the Higher Self"— the divine spirit whose consciousness is

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based upon and derived solely (at any rate during the mortal life of the man in whom it is captive) from the Mind, which we have agreed to call the *Human Soul* (the “Spiritual Soul” being the vehicle of the Spirit). In its turn the former (the *personal* or human soul) is a compound, in its highest form, of spiritual aspirations, volitions, and divine love; and in its lower aspect, of animal desires and terrestrial passions imparted to it by its associations with its vehicle, the seat of all these. It thus stands as a link and a medium between the animal nature of man which its higher reason seeks to subdue, and his divine spiritual nature to which it gravitates, whenever it has the upper hand in its struggle with the *inner animal*. The latter is the instinctual “animal Soul”, and is the hotbed of those passions which, as just shown, are lulled instead of being killed, and locked up in their breasts by some imprudent enthusiasts. Do they still hope to turn thereby the muddy stream of the animal sewer into the crystalline waters of life? And where, on what neutral ground, can they be imprisoned so as not to affect man? The fierce passions of love and lust are still alive, and they are allowed to still remain in the place of their birth — *that same animal soul*; for both the higher and the lower portions of the “Human Soul” or Mind reject such inmates, though they cannot avoid being tainted with them as neighbours. The “Higher Self” or Spirit is as unable to assimilate such feelings as water to get mixed with oil or unclean liquid tallow. It is thus the mind alone — the sole link and medium between the man of earth and the Higher Self — that is the only sufferer, and which is in incessant danger of being dragged down by those passions that may be reawakened at any moment, and perish in the abyss of matter. And how can it ever attune itself to the divine harmony of the highest Principle, when that harmony is destroyed by the mere presence, within the Sanctuary in preparation, of such animal passions? How can harmony prevail and conquer, when the soul is stained and distracted with the turmoil of passions and the terrestrial desire of the bodily senses, or even of the “Astral Man”?

For this “Astral” — the shadowy “double” (in the animal as in man) is not the companion of the *divine Ego* but of the *earthly body*. It is the link between the personal SELF, the lower consciousness of *Manas* and the Body, and is the vehicle of *transitory, not of immortal life*. Like the shadow projected by man, it follows his movements and impulses slavishly and mechanically, and leans therefore to matter without ever ascending to Spirit. It is only when the power of the passions is dead altogether, and when they have been crushed and annihilated in the retort of an unflinching will; when not only all the lusts and longings of the flesh are dead, but also the recognition of the personal Self is killed out and the “Astral” has been reduced in consequence to a cipher, that the Union with the “Higher Self” can take place. Then when the “Astral” reflects only the conquered man, the still living but no more the longing, selfish personality, then the brilliant *Augoeides*, the divine SELF, can vibrate in conscious harmony with both the poles of the human Entity — the man of matter purified, and the ever pure Spiritual Soul — and stand in the presence of MASTER SELF, the Christos of the mystic Gnostic, blended, merged into, and one with IT for ever. [Those who would feel inclined to see three *Egos* in one man will show themselves unable to perceive the metaphysical meaning. Man is a trinity composed of Body, Soul, and Spirit; but *man* is nevertheless *one*, and is surely not his body. It is the latter which is the property, the transitory clothing of the man. The three “Egos” are MAN in his three aspects on the astral, intellectual or psychic, and the Spiritual planes, or states]

How, then, can it be thought possible for a man to enter the “straight gate” of occultism when his daily and hourly thoughts are bound up with worldly things, desires of possession and power, with lust, ambition, and duties which, however honourable, are still of the earth earthy? Even the love for wife and family — the purest as the most unselfish of human affections — is a barrier to *real* occultism. For whether we take as an example the holy love of a mother for her child, or that of a husband for his wife, even in these feelings, when analyzed to the very bottom, and thoroughly sifted, there is still *selfishness* in the first, and an *ūgoisme a deux* in the second instance. What mother would not sacrifice without a moment's hesitation hundreds and thousands of lives for that of the child of her heart? and what lover or true husband would not break the happiness of every other man and woman around him to satisfy the

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desire of one whom he loves? This is but natural, we shall be told. Quite so, in the light of the code of human affections; less so, in that of divine universal love. For, while the heart is full of thoughts for a little group of *selves*, near and dear to us, how shall the rest of mankind fare in our souls? What percentage of love and care will there remain to bestow on the “great orphan”? And how shall the “still small voice” make itself heard in a soul entirely occupied with its own privileged tenants? What room is there left for the needs of Humanity *en bloc* to impress themselves upon, or even receive a speedy response? And yet, he who would profit by the wisdom of the universal mind, has to reach it through *the whole of Humanity* without distinction of race, complexion, religion, or social status. It is *altruism*, not *ego-ism* even in its most legal and noble conception, that can lead the unit to merge its little Self in the Universal Selves. It is to *these* needs and to this work that the true disciple of true Occultism has to devote himself if he would obtain *theo*-sophy, divine Wisdom and Knowledge.

The aspirant has to choose absolutely between the life of the world and the life of occultism. It is useless and vain to endeavour to unite the two, for no one can serve two masters and satisfy both. No one can serve his body and the higher Soul, and do his family duty and his universal duty, without depriving either one or the other of its rights; for he will either lend his ear to the “still small voice” and fail to hear the cries of his little ones, or, he will listen but to the wants of the latter and remain deaf to the voice of Humanity. It would be a ceaseless, a maddening struggle for almost any married man, who would pursue *true* practical Occultism, instead of its *theoretical* philosophy. For he would find himself ever hesitating between the voice of the impersonal divine love of Humanity, and that of the personal, terrestrial love. And this could only lead him to fail in one or the other, or perhaps in both his duties. Worse than this. For, *whoever indulges, after having pledged himself to OCCULTISM, in the gratification of a terrestrial love or lust*, must feel an almost immediate result — that of being irresistibly dragged from the impersonal divine state down to the lower plane of matter. Sensual, or even mental, self-gratification involves the immediate loss of the powers of spiritual discernment; the voice of the MASTER can no longer be distinguished from that of one's passions, *or even that of a Dugpa*; the right from wrong; sound morality from mere casuistry. The Dead Sea fruit assumes the most glorious mystic appearance, only to turn to ashes on the lips, and to gall in the heart, resulting in:

Depth ever deepening,
Darkness darkening still;
Folly for wisdom, guilt for innocence;
Anguish for rapture, And for hope despair.

And once being mistaken and having acted on their mistakes, most men shrink from realizing their error, and thus descend deeper and deeper into the mire. And, although it is the intention that decides primarily whether *white or black magic* is exercised, yet the results even of involuntary, unconscious sorcery cannot fail to be productive of bad Karma. Enough has been said to show that *sorcery is any kind of evil influence exercised upon other persons, who suffer, or make other persons suffer, in consequence*. Karma is a heavy stone splashed in the quiet waters of Life; and it must produce ever widening circles or ripples, carried wider and wider, almost *ad infinitum*. Such causes produced have to call forth effects and these are evidenced in the just laws of Retribution.

Much of this may be avoided if people will only abstain from rushing into practices neither the nature nor importance of which they understand. No one is expected to carry a burden beyond his strength and powers. There are “natural born magicians”; Mystics and Occultists by birth, and by right of direct

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inheritance from a series of incarnations and aeons of suffering and failures. These are passion-proof, so to say. No fires of earthly origin can fan into a flame any of their senses or desires; no human voice can find response in their souls, except the great cry of Humanity. These only may be certain of success. But they can be met only far and wide, and they pass through the narrow gates of Occultism because they carry no personal luggage of human transitory sentiments along with them. They have got rid of the feeling of the lower personality, paralyzed thereby the “astral” animal, and the golden, but narrow gate is thrown open before them. Not so with those who have to carry yet for several incarnations the burden of sins committed in previous lives, and even in their present existence. For such, unless they proceed with great caution, the golden gate of Wisdom may get transformed into the wide gate and the broad way “that leadeth unto destruction”, and therefore “many be they that enter in thereby”. This is the Gate of the Occult arts, practised for selfish motives and in the absence of the restraining and beneficent influence of ATMA-VIDYA. We are in the Kali Yuga and its fatal influence is a thousandfold more powerful in the West than it is in the East; hence the easy preys made by the Powers of the Age of Darkness in this cyclic struggle, and the many delusions under which the world is now labouring. One of these is the relative facility with which men fancy they can get at the “Gate” and cross the threshold of Occultism without any great sacrifice. It is the dream of most Theosophists, one inspired by desire for power and personal selfishness, and it is not such feelings that can ever lead them to the coveted goal. For, as well said by one believed to have sacrificed himself for Humanity — “narrow is the gate and straightened the way that leadeth unto life eternal”, and therefore “few be they that find it”. So straight indeed, that at the bare mention of some of the preliminary difficulties the affrighted Western candidates turn back and retreat with a shudder....

Let them stop here and attempt no more in their great weakness. For, if while turning their backs on the narrow gate, they are dragged by their desire for the Occult one step in the direction of the broad and more inviting Gates of that golden mystery which glitters in the light of illusion, woe to them! It can lead only to Dugpa-ship, and they will be sure to find themselves very soon landed on that *Via Fatale* of the *Inferno*, over whose portal Dante read the words:

Per me si va nella citta dolente
Per me si va nell' eterno dolore
Per me si va tra la perduta gente....