

## Symbology in *The Secret Doctrine*

***The Secret Doctrine***, which was published in 1888, 125 years ago, is true to its name in every sense. It is a book which offers to the intuitive reader many truths, but remains a secret to others. It is a misnomer to think that any reader can understand the meaning of the various explanations of the symbols in the scriptures & traditions of the world. Over years of study and meditation, some of the meanings unravel themselves, a few in an objective sense, and others, both in an objective and a subjective sense. It would also be too presumptuous to offer in a short article, all the symbolism enshrined in this monumental work.

One's study would be incomplete if one did not understand the extraordinary powers of its author, **Mme. H.P.Blavatsky**, who under the inspiration of her spiritual Masters, penned this book. At times, it was her writing, using the normal methods and means adopted by any author; at other times, she was an amanuensis for others who were her Superiors. There were times that she was the vehicle of an Adept. Therefore, the interpretation of the symbols is from perspectives far beyond the ken and understanding of the uninitiated. Having said this, let us remember what Mme H.P.Blavatsky says in her article, '*The Real History of the Rosicrucians*': "The study and interpretation of symbology forms a most important element in the education of occult disciples..." The journey to understanding the symbols has to begin, sooner or later.

In the ***Isis Unveiled***, which was the predecessor of *The Secret Doctrine*, she says, "But we ought, perhaps, to explain the ancient use of allegory and symbology. The truth in the former was left to be deduced.... Hence the rejoinder of Jesus when his disciples interrogated him because he spoke to the multitude in parables. "To you," said he, "it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given.'" It is important to understand the need for hiding esoteric truths behind glyph and symbol. The Mahatma says, "On close observation, you will find that it was never the intention of the Occultists really to conceal what they had been writing from the earnest determined students, but rather to lock up their information for safety-sake, in a secure safe-box, the key to which is — intuition. The degree of diligence and zeal with which the hidden meaning is sought by the student, is generally the test — how far he is entitled to the possession of the so buried treasure."

H.P.B. in her article, '*Babel of Modern Thought*', speaks of *The Secret Doctrine* and its purpose. It would be well worth reading her words: "The work is essentially fragmentary, giving statements of sundry facts taught in the esoteric schools—kept, so far, secret—by which the ancient symbolism of various nations is interpreted. It does not even give the keys to it, but merely opens a few of the hitherto secret drawers. No new philosophy is set up in *The Secret Doctrine*, only the hidden meaning of some of the religious allegories of antiquity is given, light being thrown on these by the esoteric sciences, and the common source is pointed out, whence all the world-religions and philosophies have sprung. Its chief attempt is to show, that however divergent the respective doctrines and

systems of old may *seem* on their external or objective side, the agreement between all becomes perfect, so soon as the esoteric or *inner* side of these beliefs and their symbology are examined and a careful comparison made. It is also maintained that its doctrines and sciences, which form an integral cycle of universal cosmic facts and metaphysical axioms and truths, represent a complete and unbroken system; and that he who is brave and persevering enough, ready to crush the *animal* in himself, and forgetting the human *self*, sacrifices it to his Higher Ego, can always find his way to become initiated into these mysteries. This is all *The Secret Doctrine* claims.” Therefore, the moral element is very important when trying to unravel the mysteries enshrined in *The Secret Doctrine*. In this context, it is of paramount importance to understand that ***The Voice of the Silence*** was given to us by ***Mme. H.P.Blavatsky***, so that the required spiritual and moral foundation is laid when trying to live the life required to understand *The Secret Doctrine*.

In order to enthuse the reader to research further, a few of the significant symbols explained in *The Secret Doctrine* are highlighted here.

**The Mundane Egg:** H.P.B. explains the different traditions of the world which speak of the ‘Egg’. She says, “The “First Cause” had no name in the beginnings. Later it was pictured in the fancy of the thinkers as an ever invisible, mysterious Bird that dropped an Egg into Chaos, which Egg becomes the Universe. Hence Brahm was called Kalahansa, “the swan in (Space and) Time.” He became the “Swan of Eternity,” who lays at the beginning of each Mahamanvantara a “Golden Egg.” It typifies the great Circle, or O, itself a symbol for the universe and its spherical bodies.

The second reason for its having been chosen as the symbolical representation of the Universe, and of our earth, was its form. It was a Circle and a Sphere; and the ovi-form shape of our globe must have been known from the beginning of symbology, since it was so universally adopted.” She goes on to mention the other traditions such as the Greeks, the Syrians, Persians, and Egyptians who respected this symbol.

**The Sarpa (or The Serpent) and the Dragon:** This is a much misunderstood symbol, about which H.P.B. has written much both in *The Secret Doctrine* as also in the *Isis Unveiled*. She says in *The Secret Doctrine*, “The Earth is said to cast off her old *three* skins, because this refers to the three preceding Rounds she has already passed through; the present being the *fourth* Round out of the seven. At the beginning of every new ROUND, after a period of “obscuration,” the earth (as do also the other six “earths”) casts off, or is supposed to cast off, her old skins as the Serpent does: therefore she is called in the *Aitareya-Brâhmana* the *Sarpa Rajni*, the “Queen of the Serpents,” and “the mother of all that moves.” The “Seven Skins,” in the first of which she now stands, refer to the seven geological changes which accompany and correspond to the evolution of the Seven Root-Races of Humanity.” We may understand this further from a few

lines in the *Isis Unveiled*, where she writes, “we quote from the serpent Mantra, in the *Aytareya-Brahmana*, a passage which speaks of the earth as the *Sarpa Râjni*, the Queen of the Serpents, and “the mother of all that moves.” These expressions refer to the fact that before our globe had become egg-shaped or round it was a long trail of cosmic dust or fire-mist, moving and writhing like a serpent. This, say the explanations, was the Spirit of God moving on the chaos until its breath had incubated cosmic matter and made it assume the annular shape of a serpent with its tail in its mouth — emblem of eternity in its spiritual and of our world in its physical sense.” The emblem of The Theosophical Society has a serpent swallowing its tail. Elsewhere she writes, “As will be found more than once as we proceed, the “Serpent” and “Dragon” were the names given to the “Wise Ones,” the initiated adepts of olden times. It was their wisdom and their learning that were devoured or assimilated by their followers, whence the allegory...The *Nâgas* of the Hindu and Tibetan adepts were human *Nâgas* (Serpents), not reptiles. Moreover, the Serpent has ever been the type of consecutive or serial rejuvenation, of IMMORTALITY and TIME.”

**Satan and the Fall of Angels:** There are some extremely interesting truths that H.P.B. gives in the context of Satan and the Fallen Angels. If anthropomorphised and dogmatised by the cunning, these symbols are turned into ones of sin and fear, by which the laity can be manipulated. The real significance of symbols in mythology can be understood in her writings. H.P.B. writes in *The Secret Doctrine*, “The “Old Dragon” and Satan, now become singly and collectively the symbol of, and the theological term for, the “Fallen Angel,” is not so described either in *the original Kabala* (the Chaldean “Book of Numbers”) or in the modern. For the most learned, if not the greatest of modern Kabalists, namely Eliphas Lévi, describes Satan in the following glowing terms:—“It is that Angel who was proud enough to believe himself God; brave enough to buy his independence at the price of eternal suffering and torture; beautiful enough to have adored himself in full divine light; strong enough to reign in darkness amidst agony, and to have built himself a throne on his inextinguishable pyre....”... Yes, indeed; it is this grandest of ideals, this ever-living symbol—nay apotheosis—of self-sacrifice for the intellectual independence of humanity; this ever active Energy protesting against Static Inertia—the principle to which Self-assertion is a crime, and Thought and the *Light of Knowledge* odious.” In continuance, she writes, “The *Fall* was the *result of man’s knowledge*, for his “eyes were opened.” Indeed, he was taught Wisdom and the hidden knowledge by the “Fallen Angel,” for the latter had become from that day his *Manas*, Mind and Self-consciousness. In each of us that golden thread of continuous life—periodically broken into active and passive cycles of sensuous existence on Earth, and super-sensuous in Devachan—is from the beginning of our appearance upon this earth. It is the *Sutrâtma*, the luminous thread of immortal *impersonal* monadship, on which our earthly lives or evanescent *Egos* are strung as so many beads—according to the beautiful expression of Vedantic philosophy.

And now it stands proven that Satan, or the Red *Fiery Dragon*, the “Lord of Phosphorus” (brimstone was a theological improvement), and *Lucifer*, or “Light-

Bearer,” is in us: it is our *Mind*—our tempter and Redeemer, our intelligent liberator and Saviour from pure animalism. Without this principle—the emanation of the very essence of the pure divine principle *Mahat* (Intelligence), which radiates direct from the *Divine mind*—we would be surely no better than animals.” This should clearly render the right perspective for our clearer understanding of the subject.

**The Cross:** Yet another symbol, which is associated primarily with the Christian religion, is explained by H.P.B. It is not the intention to give here everything that she says on this subject. Notwithstanding, it should be understood that on closer examination, the Cross is a universal symbol, perhaps mostly popularised by Christianity. For example, she writes in *The Secret Doctrine*, also referring to the work, *The Source of Measures*: “The 3 and the 4, the triangle and the cube, or the male and female universal glyph, showing the first aspect of the evolving deity, is stamped for ever in the Southern Cross in the Heavens, as in the Egyptian *Crux-Ansata*. As well expressed, “The Cube unfolded is in display a cross of the *tau*, or Egyptian form, or of the Christian cross form. . . . A circle attached to the first, gives the *ansated cross*. . . numbers 3 and 4 counted on the cross, showing a form of the (Hebrew) golden candlestick (in the Holy of Holies), and of the  $3 + 4 = 7$ , and  $6 + 1 = 7$ , days in the *circle of the week*, as 7 lights of the sun. So also as the week of 7 lights gave origin to the *month* and *year*, so it is the *time marker of birth*. . . . The cross form being shown, then, by the connected use of the form 113:355, the symbol is completed by the *attachment of a man to the cross*. This kind of measure was made to co-ordinate with the idea of the *origin* of human life ...”

Many authors both within and outside the Theosophical Movement, have referred to and based their works of religion, philosophy, science and even fiction on the ideas and facts given in *The Secret Doctrine*. It is important for every earnest student of Theosophy to refer to this great work in his or her quest for truth.

H.P.B. never claimed anything beyond what was true. She was modest as ever when she wrote, “But to the public in general and the readers of the “Secret Doctrine” I may repeat what I have stated all along, and which I now clothe in the words of Montaigne: Gentlemen, “I HAVE HERE MADE ONLY A NOSEGAY OF CULLED FLOWERS, AND HAVE BROUGHT NOTHING OF MY OWN BUT THE STRING THAT TIES THEM.”

**Chaganti V.K. Maithreya F.T.S.**  
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