

H. P. Blavatsky on the Nature of Magic

(Extracts from *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, USA.)



HPB in a painting by Hermann Schmiechen

[Compiler's note: Although written more than a century ago these excerpts from HPB's writings continue to be profoundly relevant, particularly when the spread of so-called magical teachings and practices is so widespread in the world today. It is, as always, for the reader to consider if her warnings are helpful in addressing the many problems which are created by attempting to manipulate psychic and natural forces, particularly with a view of personal benefit.]

The exercise of magical power is the exercise of natural powers, but SUPERIOR to the ordinary functions of Nature. A miracle is not a violation of the laws of Nature, except for ignorant people. Magic is but a science, a profound knowledge of the Occult forces in Nature, and of the laws governing the visible or the invisible world. Spiritualism in the hands of an adept becomes Magic, for he is learned in the art of blending together the laws of the Universe, without breaking any of them and thereby violating Nature. In the hands of an

experienced medium, Spiritualism becomes UNCONSCIOUS SORCERY; for, by allowing himself to become the helpless tool of a variety of spirits, of whom he knows nothing save what the latter permit him to know, he opens, unknown to himself, a door of communication between the two worlds, through which emerge the blind forces of Nature lurking in the astral light, as well as good and bad spirits. (Vol. I, p. 137)

A powerful mesmerizer, profoundly learned in his science, such as Baron Du Potet, Regazzoni, Pietro d'Amicis of Bologna, are magicians, for they have become the adepts, the initiated ones, into the great mystery of our Mother Nature. Such men as the above-mentioned—and such were Mesmer and Cagliostro—control the spirits instead of allowing their subjects or themselves to be controlled by them; and Spiritualism is safe in their hands. In the absence of experienced Adepts though, it is always safer for a naturally clairvoyant medium to trust to good luck and chance, and try to judge of the tree by its fruits. Bad spirits will seldom communicate through a pure, naturally good and virtuous person; and it is still more seldom that pure spirits will choose impure channels. Like attracts like. (Vol. I, pp. 137- 138)

To doubt Magic is to reject History itself as well as the testimony of ocular witnesses thereof, during a period embracing over 4,000 years. Beginning with Homer, Moses, Hermes, Herodotus, Cicero, Plutarch, Pythagoras, Apollonius of Tyana, Simon the Magician, Plato, Pausanias, Iamblichus, and following this endless string of great men, historians and philosophers, who all of them either believed in magic or were magicians themselves, and ending with our modern authors, such as W. Howitt, Ennemoser, H. R. Gougenot des Mousseaux, Marquis de Mirville and the late Éliphas Lévi, who was a magician himself ... (Vol. I, pp. 138-139)

Thus magic exists and has existed ever since prehistoric ages. Begun in history with the Samothracian mysteries, it followed its course uninterrupted, and ended for a time with the expiring theurgic rites and ceremonies of Christianized Greece; then reappeared for a time again with the Neo-Platonic, Alexandrian school, and passing, by initiation, to sundry solitary students and philosophers, safely crossed the mediaeval ages, and notwithstanding the furious persecutions of the Church, resumed its fame in the hands of such adepts as Paracelsus and several others, and finally died out in Europe with the Count de St. Germain and Cagliostro, to seek refuge from the frozen-hearted skepticism in its native country of the East. In India, magic has never died out, and blossoms there as well as ever. Practised, as in ancient Egypt, only within the secret enclosure of the Temples, it was, and still is, called the “sacred science.” For it is a science, based on natural occult forces of Nature; and not merely a blind belief in the poll-parrot talking of crafty, elementary ones, ready to forcibly prevent real, disembodied spirits from communicating with their loved ones whenever they can do so. (Vol. I, pp. 141- 142)

Our Society believes in no miracle, divine, diabolical or human, nor in anything which eludes the grasp of either philosophical and logical induction, or the syllogistic method of deduction. But if the corrupted and comparatively modern term of “magic” is understood to mean the higher study and knowledge of nature and deep research into her hidden powers—those occult and mysterious laws which constitute the ultimate essence of every element, whether with the ancients we recognize but four or five, or with the moderns over sixty; or, again, if by magic is meant that ancient study within the sanctuaries known as the “worship of the Light,” or divine and spiritual wisdom as distinct from the worship of darkness or ignorance, which led the initiated High-priests of antiquity among the Âryans, Chaldaeans, Medes and Egyptians to be called Maha, Magi or Maginsi, and by the Zoroastrians Meghistom (from the root Meh’al, great, learned, wise)—then, we Theosophists “plead guilty.”

We do study that “Science of Sciences,” extolled by the Eclectics and Platonists of the Alexandrian Schools, and practised by the theurgists and the mystics of every age. If, magic gradually fell into disrepute, it was not because of its intrinsic worthlessness, but through misconception and ignorance of its primitive meaning, and especially the cunning policy of Christian theologians, who feared lest many of the phenomena produced by and through natural (though occult) law should give the direct lie to, and thus cheapen “Divine biblical miracle,” and so forced the people to attribute every manifestation that they could not comprehend, or explain—to the direct agency of a personal devil. (Vol. II, p. 32)

At one end of the ladder which stretches from heaven to earth is Īsvara—Spirit, Supreme Being, subjective, invisible and incomprehensible; at the other his visible manifestation, “sacrificial fire.”

So well has this been comprehended by every religious philosophy of antiquity that the enlightened Pârsî worships not gross flame but the divine Spirit within, of which it is the visible type; and even in the Jewish Bible there is the unapproachable Jehovah and his down-rushing fire which consumes the wood upon the altar and licks up the water in the trench about it (I Kings, xviii, 38). There also is the visible manifestation of God in the burning bush of Moses, and the Holy Ghost in the Gospels of Christians, descending like tongues of flame upon the heads of the assembled disciples on the day of Pentecost. There is not an esoteric philosophy or rather theosophy, which did not apprehend this deep spiritual idea, and each and all are traceable to the Vedic sacred books. Says the author of The Rosicrucians in his

chapter on “The Nature of Fire,” and quoting R. Fludd, the mediaeval Theosophist and Alchemist

Wonder no longer then, if [in the religions of the Aryans, Medes and Zoroastrians], rejected so long as an idolatry, the ancient Persians and their masters the Magi—concluding that they saw “All” in this supernaturally magnificent element [fire]—fell down and worshipped it; making of it the visible representation of the very truest, but yet, in man’s speculation, and in his philosophies—nay, in his commonest reason—impossible God; God being everywhere, and in us, and, indeed, us, in the God-lighted man; and impossible to be contemplated or known outside—being All! *

* [H. Jennings, op. cit., chapter X, p. 81, in 5th rev. ed., 1870.]

This is the teaching of the mediaeval Fire-Philosophers known as the Brothers of the Rosie-Cross, such as Paracelsus, Khunrath, Van Helmont, and that of all the Illuminati and Alchemists who succeeded these, and who claimed to have discovered the eternal Fire, or to have “found out God in the Immortal Light”—that Light whose radiance shone through the Yogis. The same author remarks of them:

Already, in their determined climbing unto the heights of thought, had these Titans of mind achieved, past the cosmical, through the shadowy borders of Real and Unreal, into Magic. For, is Magic wholly false? —he goes on to ask. No; certainly not, when by magic is understood the higher study of divine, and yet not supernatural law, though the latter be, as yet, undiscovered by exact and materialistic science. (Vol. II, pp. 35-36)

The great science, called by the vulgar “magic,” and by its Eastern proficientes Gupta-Vidya, embracing as it does each and every science, since it is the acme of knowledge, and constitutes the perfection of philosophy, is universal; hence—as very truly remarked cannot be confined to one particular nation or geographical locality. But, as Truth is one, the method for the attainment of its highest proficiency must necessarily be also one. It cannot be subdivided, for, once reduced to parts, each of them, left to itself, will, like rays of light, diverge from, instead of converging to, its centre, the ultimate goal of knowledge; and these parts can re- become the Whole only by collecting them together again, or each fraction will remain but a fraction. This truism, which may be termed elementary mathematics for little boys, has to be recalled in order to refresh the memory of such “adepts” as are too apt to forget that “Christian Kabbalism” is but a fraction of Universal Occult Science. And, if they believe that they have nothing more to learn, then the less they turn to “Eastern Adepts” for information, the better and the less trouble for both. There is but one royal road to “Divine Magic”; neglect and abandon it to devote yourself specially to one of the paths diverging from it, and like a lonely wanderer you will find yourself lost in an inextricable labyrinth. Magic, I suppose, existed millenniums before the Christian era; and, if so, are we to think then, with our too-learned friends, the modern “Western Kabbalists,” that it was all Black Magic, practiced by the “old firm of Devil & Co.”? (Vol. III, p. 266)

Occultism is not magic. It is comparatively easy to learn the trick of spells and the methods of using the subtler, but still material, forces of physical nature; the powers of the animal soul in man are soon awakened; the forces which his love, his hate, his passion, can call into operation, are readily developed. But this is Black Magic— Sorcery. For it is the motive, and the motive alone, which makes any exercise of power become black, malignant, or white, beneficent Magic. It is impossible to employ spiritual forces if there is the slightest tinge of selfishness remaining in the operator. For, unless the intention is entirely unalloyed, the spiritual will transform itself into the psychic, act on the astral plane, and dire results may be

produced by it. The powers and forces of animal nature can equally be used by the selfish and revengeful, as by the unselfish and the all-forgiving; the powers and forces of spirit lend themselves only to the perfectly pure in heart—and this is DIVINE MAGIC.
(Vol. IX, pp. 156- 157)

The occult sciences, or rather the key which alone explains the jargon in which they are expressed, cannot be divulged. Like the Sphinx who dies the moment the enigma of its being is guessed by an Oedipus, they remain occult only as long as they are unknown to the uninitiated. Then again they can neither be bought nor sold. A Rosicrucian “becomes, he is not made,” says an old adage of the Hermetic philosophers, to which the Occultists add, “The science of the gods is mastered by violence; it must be conquered, and does not give itself.” This is exactly what the author of the Acts of the Apostles intended to convey when he gave the answer of Peter to Simon Magus: “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money” [Acts viii, 20]. Occult knowledge should be used neither to make money, nor to attain any egotistical end, not even as a means to personal vanity.

Let us go further and say at once that—apart from an exceptional case where gold might be the means of saving a whole nation—even the act of transmutation itself, when the only motive is the acquisition of riches, becomes black magic. So that neither the secrets of magic nor of occultism, nor of alchemy, can ever be revealed during the existence of our race, which worships the golden calf with an ever increasing frenzy. (Vol. XI, p. 546)

The fact that the Occult Sciences have been withheld from the world at large, and denied by the Initiates to Humanity, has often been made matter of complaint. It has been alleged that the Guardians of the Secret Lore were selfish in withholding the “treasures” of Archaic Wisdom; that it was positively criminal to keep back such knowledge – “if any” – from the men of Science, etc.

Yet there must have been some very good reasons for it, since from the very dawn of History such has been the policy of every Hierophant and “Master.” Pythagoras, the first Adept and real Scientist in pre-Christian Europe, is accused of having taught in public the immobility of the earth, and the rotary motion of the stars around it, while he was declaring to his privileged Adepts his belief in the motion of the Earth as a planet, and in the heliocentric system. The reasons for such secrecy, however, are many and were never made a mystery of. The chief cause was given in Isis Unveiled. It may now be repeated.

From the very day when the first mystic [taught by the first Instructor of the “divine Dynasties” of the early races, was taught] the means of communication between this world and the worlds of the invisible host, between the sphere of matter and that of pure spirit, he concluded that to abandon this mysterious science to the [desecration, willing or unwilling, of the profane] rabble – was to lose it. An abuse of it might lead mankind to speedy destruction; it was like surrounding a group of children with explosive [substances], and furnishing them with matches. The first [divine Instructor] initiated but a select few, and kept silence with the multitudes. [They recognized their “God” and each Adept felt the great “SELF” within himself.] The “Atman,” the self, the mighty Lord and Protector, once that man knew him as the “I am,” the “Ego Sum,” the “Asmi,” showed his full power to him who could recognize the “still small voice.” From the days of the primitive man described by the first Vedic poet, down to our modern age, there has not been a philosopher worthy of that name, who did not carry in the silent sanctuary of his heart the grand and mysterious truth. If initiated, he learnt it as a sacred science; if otherwise, then, like Socrates, repeating to himself as well as his fellowmen, the noble injunction, “O man, know thyself,” he succeeded in recognizing his God within himself. “Ye

are gods,” the king-psalmist tells us, and we find Jesus reminding the scribes that this expression was addressed to other mortal men, claiming for themselves the same privilege without any blasphemy. And, as a faithful echo, Paul, while asserting that we are all “the temple of the living God,” cautiously adds that after all these things are only for the “wise,” and it is “unlawful” to speak of them. (Vol. XIV, pp. 47-48)

One cannot study and profit by Occult Science, unless one gives himself up to it – heart, soul, and body. Some of its truths are too awful, too dangerous, for the average mind. None can toy and play with such terrible weapons with impunity. Therefore it is, as St. Paul has it, “unlawful” to speak of them. Let us accept the reminder and talk only of that which is “lawful.”

... The practical teachings of Occult Science are entirely different, and few are the strong minds fitted for them. As to ecstasy, and such like kinds of self-illumination, this may be obtained by oneself and without any teacher or initiation, for ecstasy is reached by an inward command and control of Self over the physical Ego; as to obtaining mastery over the forces of Nature, this requires a long training, or the capacity of one born a “natural Magician.” Meanwhile, those who possess neither of the requisite qualifications are strongly advised to limit themselves to purely spiritual development. But even this is difficult, as the first necessary qualification is an unshakable belief in one’s own powers and the Deity within oneself; otherwise a man would simply develop into an irresponsible medium. Throughout the whole mystic literature of the ancient world we detect the same idea of spiritual Esotericism, that the personal God exists within, nowhere outside, the worshipper. That personal Deity is no vain breath, or a fiction, but an immortal Entity, the Initiator of the Initiates, now that the heavenly or Celestial Initiators of primitive humanity – the Sistas of the preceding cycles – are no more among us. Like an undercurrent, rapid and clear, it runs without mixing its crystalline purity with the muddy and troubled waters of dogmatism, an enforced anthropomorphic Deity and religious intolerance. (Vol. XIV, p. 54)

The disciples of Simon Magus were numerous, and were instructed by him in magic. They made use of so-called “exorcisms” (as in the New Testament), incantations, philtres; believed in dreams and visions, and produced them at will; and finally forced the lower orders of spirits to obey them. Simon Magus was called “the Great Power of God” literally “the Potency of the Deity which is called Great.” That which was then termed Magic we now call Theosophia, or Divine Wisdom, Power and Knowledge. (Vol. XII, p. 557)

Esoteric Science is, above all, the knowledge of our relations with and in divine magic,* inseparableness from our divine Selves—the latter meaning something else besides our own higher spirit. Thus, before proceeding to exemplify and explain these relations, it may perhaps be useful to give the student a correct idea of the full meaning of this most misunderstood word “magic.”

* Magic, Magia, means in its spiritual, secret sense, the “Great Life” or divine life in spirit.

The root is magh, as seen in the Sanskrit mahat, Zend mazas, Greek megas [μεγας], and Latin magnus, all signifying “great.” (Vol. XII, p. 551)

MAGIC is a dual power: nothing is easier than to turn it into Sorcery; an evil thought suffices for it. Therefore while theoretical Occultism is harmless, and may do good, practical Magic, or the fruits of the Tree of Life and Knowledge, or otherwise the “Science of Good and Evil,”

is fraught with dangers and perils. For the study of theoretical Occultism there are, no doubt, a number of works that may be read with profit, besides such books as the *Finer Forces of Nature*, etc., the *Zohar*, *S'pher-Yetzīrah*, *The Book of Enoch*, *Franck's Kabbalah*, and many Hermetic treatises. These are scarce in European languages, but works in Latin by the mediaeval Philosophers, generally known as Alchemists and Rosicrucians, are plentiful. But even the perusal of these may prove dangerous for the unguided student. If approached without the right key to them, and if the student is unfit, owing to mental incapacity, for Magic, and is thus unable to discern the Right from the Left Path, let him take our advice and leave this study alone; he will only bring on himself and on his family unexpected woes and sorrows, never suspecting whence they come, nor what are the powers awakened by his mind being bent on them. Works for advanced students are many, but these can be placed at the disposal of only sworn or "pledged" chelas (disciples), those who have pronounced the ever-binding oath, and who are, therefore, helped and protected. For all other purposes, well-intentioned as such works may be, they can only mislead the unwary and guide them imperceptibly to Black Magic or Sorcery – if to nothing worse. (Vol. XIV, pp. 59-60)