

## *Isis Unveiled: A Perspective*

*Isis Unveiled* was never intended to unveil Isis, the Egyptian goddess who here represents the mysteries of nature. Blavatsky had given this book to the printer with the title, *The Veil of Isis*. But after printing had commenced, it was found that this title had already been used elsewhere. So a new title had to be found quickly. The publisher suggested *Isis Unveiled*, and Blavatsky had little choice but to agree.<sup>1</sup>

The book which came out as *Isis Unveiled* was intended not to unveil the mysteries of nature, but to make known to the world the existence of a once universal Wisdom-Religion, now hidden from view. The symbolical Isis, the Wisdom-Religion, is indeed veiled since it had been lost to the world for long ages, but it exists! This startling news caused so much excitement that the first printing of 1000 copies sold out in 10 days.<sup>2</sup>

What is the Wisdom-Religion? It is described by Blavatsky in her later book, *The Secret Doctrine*, as the universally diffused religion of the ancient and prehistoric world.<sup>3</sup> Further, all the presently existing religions and philosophies originate from it. When this is recognized, the divisive walls that separate one group of people from another crumble. It was brought out to help achieve this, in keeping with the first object of Blavatsky's Theosophical Society, to promote universal brotherhood.

In making known to the modern world for the first time the existence of the once universal Wisdom-Religion, Blavatsky had a twofold task. She had first to show that science did not have all the answers; that the ancients had knowledge of things not yet discovered by science. This she did in volume I of *Isis Unveiled*. She had also to show that religion in its separatism had ceased to meet humanity's needs, but that these separate pieces come together in the one archaic Wisdom-Religion. This she did in volume II.

Throughout both volumes of *Isis Unveiled* she cited book after book written by ancient authors from all over the world, showing on their part a knowledge of the teachings of the now lost Wisdom-Religion. In this way she showed that although this knowledge had become lost, partly through the religious fervor of followers of separate religions, and partly through being withdrawn by its custodians to safeguard it from such sectarians, it was once common knowledge. But it had for many centuries been carefully hidden away.

So how did Blavatsky learn of the existence of the once universal Wisdom-Religion, hidden so well for so long? She had gone to the East in search of wisdom, and found there certain individuals who were its custodians. But Blavatsky was not the only person to travel to the East in search of wisdom. Why did she find the Wisdom-Religion, when others did not? It would seem, rather, that its custodians found her.

The custodians of the Wisdom-Religion make up a secret Brotherhood centered in Tibet and India. Two members of the Tibetan Brotherhood were Blavatsky's primary teachers, called in Theosophical writings the Mahatmas K.H. (Koot Hoomi) and M. (Morya). The great fourteenth-century Tibetan teacher Tsong-kha-pa, who reformed Tibetan Buddhism and founded the Gelugpa order, is said to have also reformed the secret Tibetan Brotherhood who are the custodians of the Wisdom-Religion. Among his reforms of the latter is an injunction to make an attempt to enlighten the Western barbarians during the last quarter of each century.<sup>4</sup> Hitherto, we are told, each such attempt had failed. Then came the attempt in 1875. The Mahatma K.H. writes about the choice of Blavatsky as the agent for this in a letter now preserved in the British Library:

After nearly a century of fruitless search, our chiefs had to avail themselves of the only opportunity to send out a European *body* upon European soil to serve as a connecting link between that country and our own.<sup>5</sup>

Thus it was the custodians of the Wisdom-Religion who found her, and then allowed her to find them.

After receiving instruction from them, Blavatsky founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. She then wrote *Isis Unveiled*, which was published in 1877. In this way she made known to the modern Western world for the first time the existence of the Wisdom-Religion, still preserved in the East. She was entrusted with the task of bringing out a portion of its teachings, for which she used the term “Theosophy.” The first installment of these teachings is found in *Isis Unveiled*. It is thus a pioneering work, a work which paved the way for the much fuller installment given in her later work, *The Secret Doctrine*.

In bringing out something altogether new, *Isis Unveiled* had to devote much space to tearing down and clearing away existing beliefs that stood in the way of the acceptance of the new teachings. The existing beliefs, as said before, were firstly that modern science had all the answers, when in fact it was limited to physical reality alone; and secondly that religion had the whole truth, when in fact it had only pieces. Thus, much of *Isis Unveiled* was devoted to showing the inadequacies of science and religion, and comparatively little of it was devoted to giving out new teachings, other than the very fact of their existence. An exposition of the new teachings as such was to come later. Those who have studied *The Secret Doctrine* should therefore not expect to find in *Isis Unveiled* the same kinds of things they found in *The Secret Doctrine*. *Isis Unveiled* is quite different.

In order to get a perspective on what one will find in *Isis Unveiled*, it may be useful to review some of the comments on it made by the author and her teachers. Blavatsky writes:

. . . it was the first cautious attempt to let into the West a faint streak of Eastern esoteric light . . .<sup>6</sup>

While writing *Isis*, we were not permitted to enter into details; hence—the vague generalities.<sup>7</sup>

The Mahatma K.H. writes in his letters:

The author was made to hint and point out in the true direction, to say what things *are not*, not what they are.<sup>8</sup>

Many are the subjects treated upon in *Isis* that even H.P.B. was not allowed to become thoroughly acquainted with . . . .<sup>9</sup>

Don't you see that everything you find in *Isis* is delineated, hardly sketched—nothing completed or fully revealed.<sup>10</sup>

“Isis” was *not* unveiled but rents sufficiently large were made to afford flitting glances to be completed by the student's own intuition.<sup>11</sup>

Not only was Blavatsky not permitted to give clear details, she had to express what she could give out in a language that was foreign to her. She informs us:

When I came to America in 1873, I had not spoken English—which I had learned in my childhood colloquially—for over thirty years. I could understand when I read it, but could hardly speak the language. . . . Until 1874 I had never written one word in English. . . .<sup>12</sup>

Therefore she submitted the manuscript of *Isis Unveiled* to her co-worker Colonel Olcott to correct her English. They worked together on this, rewriting all but the passages which had been dictated to her by her teachers. Thus she says:

It is to him [Olcott] that I am indebted for the English in *Isis*.

. . . .

The language in *Isis* is not mine; but (with the exception of that portion of the work which, as I claim, was *dictated*), may be called only a sort of translation of my facts and ideas into English.<sup>13</sup>

However, Olcott was not then in a position to correct errors of doctrine that Blavatsky was oblivious to because of her lack of fluency with English.

It was my first book; it was written in a language foreign to me—in which I had not been accustomed to write; the language was even more unfamiliar to certain Asiatic philosophers who

rendered assistance; and, finally, Colonel Olcott, who revised the manuscript and worked with me throughout, was then—in the years 1875 and 1876—almost entirely ignorant of Aryan Philosophy, and hence unable to detect and correct such errors as I might so readily fall into when putting my thoughts into English.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, Olcott could not correct what he did not understand, and Blavatsky could not express what she understood.

I am [at] 47th St. New York writing *Isis* and His voice dictating to me. In that dream or *retrospective* vision I once more *rewrote* all *Isis* and could now point out all the pages and sentences Mah. K.H. dictated—as those that Master did—in my bad English, when Olcott tore his hair out by handfuls in despair to ever make out the meaning of what was intended.<sup>15</sup>

This situation necessarily led to mistakes in *Isis Unveiled*. One that was soon to catch up with her was her usage of the term “God.” Blavatsky writes in the Preface to *Isis Unveiled*:

“When, years ago, we first travelled over the East, exploring the penetralia of its deserted sanctuaries, two saddening and ever-recurring questions oppressed our thoughts: *Where, WHO, WHAT is GOD? Who ever saw the IMMORTAL SPIRIT of man, so as to be able to assure himself of man’s immortality?*”

“It was while most anxious to solve these perplexing problems that we came into contact with certain men, endowed with such mysterious powers and such profound knowledge that we may truly designate them as sages of the Orient. To their instructions we lent a ready ear. They showed us that by combining science with religion, the existence of God and immortality of man’s spirit may be demonstrated like a problem of Euclid. For the first time we received the assurance that the Oriental philosophy has room for no other faith than an absolute and immovable faith in the omnipotence of man’s own immortal self. We were taught that this omnipotence comes from the kinship of man’s spirit with the Universal Soul—God! The

latter, they said, can never be demonstrated but by the former. Man-spirit proves God-spirit, as the one drop of water proves a source from which it must have come. . . . prove the soul of man by its wondrous powers—you have proved God!”<sup>16</sup>

When writing *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky was unaware of the connotations of the word “God,” and therefore used it when she actually meant the impersonal and universal principle known in Hinduism among Adwaiti Vedantins as Parabrahman.

A sceptic in my early life, I had sought and obtained through the Masters the full assurance of the existence of a principle (not Personal God)—“a boundless and fathomless ocean” of which my “soul” was a drop. Like the Adwaitis, I made no difference between my Seventh Principle and the Universal Spirit, or Parabrahm; . . . My mistake was that throughout the whole work [*Isis Unveiled*] I indifferently employed the words Parabrahm and God to express the same idea . . .<sup>17</sup>

A few years later the problem with the use of the term “God” emerged. Two Englishmen living in India, A. P. Sinnett and A. O. Hume, had in 1880 begun a correspondence with Blavatsky’s two teachers, the Mahatmas M. and K.H. The two Englishmen then wrote about the heretofore hidden or occult teachings of the Mahatmas based on these letters. Hume had in 1882 written a “Preliminary Chapter” headed “God” intended to preface an exposition of Occult Philosophy. The Mahatma K.H. responded clearly and unmistakably:

Neither our philosophy nor ourselves believe in a God, least of all in one whose pronoun necessitates a capital H. . . . Our doctrine knows no compromises. It either affirms or it denies, for it never teaches but that which it knows to be the truth. Therefore, we deny God both as philosophers and as Buddhists. We know there are planetary and other spiritual lives, and we know there is in our system no such thing as God, either personal or impersonal. Parabrahm is not a God, but absolute immutable law. . . .<sup>18</sup>

Hume's chapter had added "God" to their philosophy, which the Mahatma regarded as a very serious problem, saying:

... if he publishes what I read, I will have H.P.B. or Djual Khool deny the whole thing; as I cannot permit our sacred philosophy to be so disfigured.<sup>19</sup>

A different kind of problem arose due to the fact, noted above, that Blavatsky could not give out Theosophical doctrines in their completeness in 1877 when *Isis Unveiled* was published. In this book she taught the threefold constitution of a human being: body, soul, and spirit. When the Theosophical teaching on the sevenfold constitution of a human being was brought out four years later, she was accused of contradiction. But as the Mahatma K.H. explained in a letter to Sinnett:

In *reality*, there is no contradiction between that passage in *Isis* and our later teaching; to anyone who never heard of the *seven* principles—constantly referred to in *Isis* as a trinity, without any more explanation—there certainly appeared to be as good a contradiction as could be. "You will write so and so, give *so far*, and no more"—she was constantly told by us, when writing her book. It was at the very beginning of a new cycle, in days when neither Christians nor Spiritualists ever thought of, let alone mentioned, more than two principles in man—*body* and *Soul*, which they called Spirit. If you had time to refer to the spiritualistic literature of that day, you would find that with the phenomenals as with the Christians, *Soul* and *Spirit* were synonymous. It was H.P.B., who, acting under the orders of Atrya (one whom you do not know) was the first to explain in the *Spiritualist* the difference there was between *psyche* and *nous*, *nefesh* and *ruach*—Soul and Spirit. She had to bring the whole arsenal of proofs with her, quotations from Paul and Plato, from Plutarch and *James*, etc., before the Spiritualists admitted that the theosophists were right. It was then that she was ordered to write *Isis*—just a year after the Society had been founded. And, as there happened such a war over it, endless polemics and objections to the effect that *there could not be in man two souls*—we thought it

was premature to give the public more than they could possibly assimilate, and before they had digested the “two souls”;—and thus, the further sub-division of the trinity into 7 principles was left unmentioned in *Isis*.<sup>20</sup>

For reasons such as this the Mahatma M. told Sinnett to beware trusting *Isis Unveiled* too implicitly,<sup>21</sup> and the Mahatma K.H. told him the same thing:

By-the-bye you must not trust *Isis* literally. The book is but a tentative effort to divert the attention of the Spiritualists from their preconceptions to the true state of things.<sup>22</sup>

The Mahatma K.H. is here not referring to the two versus three human principles question, but to the teaching of Spiritualism that the spirits of the dead can return and communicate with the living through mediums. Theosophy opposed this strongly, teaching that such activity causes serious harm to the departed, and usually to the medium as well. What can return is not the spirit of the departed, but only a “shell,” made up of his or her disintegrating lower principles. This shell may retain memories of the recently departed’s life, but it is devoid of the actual spirit or higher principles of that person. So communication with it is of little value to the living; but this positively harms the departed and seriously hinders his or her passage to the next world.

This teaching, however, was not quite clear in *Isis Unveiled*. An 1882 article called “Fragments of Occult Truth,” published in *The Theosophist*, included the clear statement: “in short, that no departed SPIRIT can visit us.”<sup>23</sup> A letter to the editor asked if this contradicted what was taught in *Isis Unveiled*, where it said: “many . . . among those who control the medium *subjectively* . . . are *human, disembodied spirits*.”<sup>24</sup> Blavatsky replied that it did not; that here the term “disembodied spirit” refers to the “*reliquiae* of the *personal* EGO,” not to the spiritual Ego. She explained that:

the term “spirit” had to be often used in the sense given to it by the Spiritualists, as well as other similar conventional terms, as, otherwise, a still greater confusion would have been caused.<sup>25</sup>



She concluded her article:

We may well be taxed with too loose and careless a mode of expression, with a misuse of the foreign language in which we write, with leaving too much unsaid and depending unwarrantably upon the imperfectly developed intuition of the reader. But there never was, nor can there be, any radical discrepancy between the teachings in *Isis* and those of the later period, as both proceed from one and the same source—the ADEPT BROTHERS.<sup>26</sup>

The next month another writer in another journal quoted this concluding sentence, and then brought up what appeared to be, indeed, a “radical discrepancy” between the teachings given in *Isis Unveiled* and those given out later.<sup>27</sup> Reincarnation seems to be denied in *Isis Unveiled*, which says:

Reincarnation, *i.e.*, the appearance of the same individual, or rather of his astral monad, twice on the same planet, is not a rule in nature; it is an exception, like the teratological phenomenon of a two-headed infant.<sup>28</sup>

Blavatsky responded in *The Theosophist* the following month that “the ‘astral’ monad is not the ‘Spiritual’ monad and *vice versa*.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, the same individual personality, a Mr. Smith, does not reincarnate; only the immortal spiritual monad that gave rise to Mr. Smith will again give rise to another personality, perhaps a Mrs. Jones. Therefore, there is no discrepancy. She remarks here, in the same vein she had earlier:

The most that can be said of the passage quoted from *Isis* is, that it is incomplete, chaotic, vague perhaps—clumsy, as many more passages in that work, the first literary production of a foreigner, who even now can hardly boast of her knowledge of the English language.<sup>30</sup>

On this reincarnation question, the Mahatma K.H. says about “the confused and tortured explanations” in *Isis Unveiled*:

. . . for its *incompleteness* no one but we, her inspirers are responsible. . . .<sup>31</sup>

This same reincarnation question on this same passage in *Isis Unveiled* was to arise again and again. Four years after her first brief reply, Blavatsky gave a detailed response, providing a description of the reincarnation process. She again showed that “there is no ‘discrepancy,’ but only *incompleteness*”<sup>32</sup> in what was given out earlier. She adds, however, that there are important mistakes in *Isis Unveiled*, resulting from being edited by others, that should be corrected. The sentence saying that the Hindu dreads transmigration and reincarnation “only on other and inferior planets, never on this one,”<sup>33</sup> should be corrected to: “The Hindu dreads transmigration in other *inferior* forms, on this planet.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in the sentence saying that “this *former life* believed in by the Buddhists, is not a life on *this planet*,”<sup>35</sup> the phrase “life on this planet” should be corrected to “*life in the same cycle*.”<sup>36</sup>

Just over two years later, these same two sentences were again corrected in a similar manner.<sup>37</sup> But here she also added a correction to the sentence cited above, “Reincarnation, *i.e.*, the appearance of the same individual, or rather of his astral monad, twice on the same planet, is not a rule in nature.” She here said that the word “planet” was a mistake and that “cycle” was meant, *i.e.*, the “cycle of Devachanic rest.”<sup>38</sup> She had already explained, more than once, that the “astral monad” is only the personality; therefore the doctrine of the reincarnation of the immortal spiritual monad is not being denied. In this article she explained further:

The paragraph quoted meant to upset the theory of the French Reincarnationists who maintain that the same *personality* is reincarnated, often a few days after death, so that a grandfather can be reborn as his own grand-daughter.<sup>39</sup>

Errors such as “planet” for “cycle” were permitted to remain in *Isis Unveiled*, she repeats, because its stereotyped plates were owned by the publisher and not by her. She then says:

The work was written under exceptional circumstances, and no doubt more than one great error may be discovered in *Isis Unveiled*.<sup>40</sup>

The “great error” discovered in *Isis Unveiled* pertaining to reincarnation was due, then, to two causes. First, as with the problem of wrong usage of the term “God,” Blavatsky had to write in a language that was foreign to her. Second, as with the problem of three human principles versus seven given later, the teachings found in *Isis Unveiled* are incomplete. The teaching that the personality does not reincarnate, without stating that the immortal spiritual monad does, led to the misconception that reincarnation is denied in the Wisdom-Religion. Blavatsky could maintain that there is no radical discrepancy between the earlier and later teachings because they come from the same source, her teachers. Thus, this would be true irrespective of whether or not she herself knew the whole teaching from the beginning. Colonel Olcott, who worked with her throughout on correcting the English in *Isis Unveiled*, writes in his *Old Diary Leaves* about the reincarnation teaching:

When we worked on *Isis* it was neither taught us by the Mahatmas or supported by her in literary controversies or private discussions of those earlier days. She held to, and defended, the theory that human souls, after death, passed on by a course of purificatory evolution to other and more spiritualised planets.<sup>41</sup>

Besides errors due to faulty expression and those arising from incompleteness, others were added by proofreaders when *Isis Unveiled* went to press. As Blavatsky describes:

. . . the proofs and pages of *Isis* passed through a number of willing but not very careful hands, and were finally left to the tender mercies of the publisher’s proof-reader.<sup>42</sup>

This resulted in other serious mistakes, such as on its opening page. About this the Mahatma K.H. writes:

Proof reader helping, a few real mistakes have crept in as on page 1, chapter 1, volume 1, where divine Essence is made emanating from Adam instead of the reverse.<sup>43</sup>

There is yet another kind of error in *Isis Unveiled*, that for obvious reasons was not noted during Blavatsky's lifetime. This kind arises from the fact that Blavatsky used the then current knowledge and books to support the teachings given to her by her teachers. For example, while writing about the Jainas, she adds that Gautama Buddha was the pupil of the Tirthamkara, the great Jaina teacher, who is called Mahavira:

It is clear that Gautama Buddha, the son of the King of Kapilavastu, and the descendant of the first Sakya, . . . did not invent his philosophy. Philanthropist by nature, his ideas were developed and matured while under the tuition of Tirthamkara, the famous guru of the Jaina sect.<sup>44</sup>

Professor C. P. Tiele wrote in his book, *Outlines of the History of Religion*, at that same time:

According to the Jainas, Gautama (Buddha) was a disciple of their great saint, Mahavira.<sup>45</sup>

This was the current view in 1877, when almost nothing was known about the Jainas, and very little about Buddhism. It is based on the fact that Mahavira's closest disciple was named Gautama. But it has long since been known that this Gautama was not Gautama Buddha, and that the latter was not a disciple of the Jaina Tirthamkara Mahavira.

Errors of this kind in regard to Buddhism are frequent in *Isis Unveiled*, attributing to Buddhism both the teaching of God and of an immortal soul, or *atma*. These teachings, of course, are not found in Buddhism. Some of these errors, such as the ones regarding God, may have been due to Blavatsky's lack of fluency with English, while others were apparently due to the fact that she drew from then available sources to back up the material given to her by her teachers.

Despite Blavatsky's repeated statements that *Isis Unveiled* was far from perfect, some of her followers regarded the whole book as infallible truth. Because some of it was dictated to her by her Mahatma teachers, they thought every word of it was. These "friends, as unwise as they were kind," writes Blavatsky, spread this idea, "and this was seized upon by the enemy and exaggerated out of all limits of truth." She continues:

It was said that the whole of *Isis* had been dictated to me *from cover to cover* and *verbatim* by these invisible Adepts. And, as the imperfections of my work were only too glaring, the consequence of all this idle and malicious talk was, that my enemies and critics inferred—as they well might—that either these invisible inspirers had no existence, and were part of my "fraud," or that they lacked the cleverness of even an average good writer.<sup>46</sup>

The idea of writing by dictation from unseen teachers was so supernatural-sounding that such rumors about *Isis Unveiled* easily arose. Blavatsky points out, however, that there is nothing supernatural about it. She affirms that the teachings come from her Eastern Masters, and "that many a passage in these works has been written by me *under their dictation*." She explains:

In saying this no *supernatural* claim is urged, for no *miracle* is performed by such a dictation. Any moderately intelligent person, convinced by this time of the many possibilities of hypnotism (now accepted by science and under full scientific investigation), and of the phenomena of *thought-transference*, will easily concede that if even a hypnotized subject, a mere irresponsible medium, *hears the unexpressed thought* of his hypnotizer, who can thus transfer his thought to him—even to *repeating the words read by the hypnotizer mentally from a book*—then my claim has nothing impossible in it. Space and distance do not exist for thought; and if two persons are in perfect mutual psycho-magnetic *rapport*, and of these two, one is a great Adept in Occult Sciences, then thought-transference and dictation of whole pages, become as easy and as comprehensible at the distance of ten thousand miles as the transference of two words across a room.<sup>47</sup>

Blavatsky stresses repeatedly that her teachers are living men, not disembodied spirits. She, while living in New York, could easily receive dictation from them, living in Tibet, since distance is no barrier to this. She also received dictation from other teachers, living in other places, for use in *Isis Unveiled*. As described by her co-worker, Colonel Olcott, their ability with English varied greatly, so that sometimes he had to make several corrections per line, and other times hardly any. The unique work of one of these teachers is described by Olcott as follows:

Most perfect of all were the manuscripts which were written for her while she was sleeping. The beginning of the chapter on the civilisation of Ancient Egypt (vol. i, chap. xiv) is an illustration. We had stopped work the evening before at about 2 A.M. as usual, both too tired to stop for our usual smoke and chat before parting; she almost fell asleep in her chair while I was bidding her good-night, so I hurried off to my bedroom. The next morning, when I came down after my breakfast, she showed me a pile of at least thirty or forty pages of beautifully written H.P.B. manuscript, which, she said, she had had written for her by—well, a Master, whose name has never yet been degraded like some others. It was perfect in every respect, and went to the printers without revision.<sup>48</sup>

The material for *Isis Unveiled* was thus given to Blavatsky piece by piece, without system. When it began, she had no idea that it would eventually become a book. The material was later arranged and rearranged. She often commented on its lack of system, saying about the resulting book:

. . . it looks in truth, as remarked by a friend, as if a mass of independent paragraphs having no connection with each other, had been well shaken up in a waste-basket, and then taken out at random and—published.<sup>49</sup>

According to the Mahatma K.H., her own contributions to *Isis Unveiled* were similarly unsystematic, and her explanations were unclear.

She . . . is unable to write with anything like system and calmness, or to remember that the general public needs all the lucid explanations that to her may seem superfluous.<sup>50</sup>

For these reasons, and the several reasons given above that errors entered *Isis Unveiled*, the Mahatma K.H. remarked:

It really ought to be *re-written* for the sake of the family honour.<sup>51</sup>

Blavatsky in fact did start to rewrite it in the mid-1880s, and announced it as such. But this was soon transformed into an altogether new book, *The Secret Doctrine*, because she was able to give out so many more truths in clear terms. Already in 1882, the situation had changed significantly. She then says:

When *Isis* was written, it was conceived by those from whom the impulse, which directed its preparation, came, that the time was not ripe for the explicit declaration of a great many truths which they are now willing to impart in plain language. So the readers of that book, were supplied rather with hints, sketches, and adumbrations of the philosophy to which it related, than with methodical expositions.<sup>52</sup>

By 1886, the situation had changed greatly. She writes:

And I tell you that the *Secret Doctrine* will be 20 times as learned, philosophical and better than *Isis* which will be *killed* by it. Now there are hundreds of things I am permitted to say and explain.<sup>53</sup>

So *Isis Unveiled* was never rewritten; instead it was replaced by *The Secret Doctrine*. But these two books cover very different ground, and much of the material given in *Isis Unveiled* is still to this day found nowhere else. We are therefore fortunate that a new edition of *Isis Unveiled* was prepared by Boris de Zirkoff, who spent countless hours correcting references, quotations, spellings, etc. We are also fortunate that an abridgement of *Isis Unveiled* was prepared by Michael Gomes, which eliminated most of the dated or erroneous explanatory material. For as

Blavatsky said about this book of hers just eleven days before she died:

I maintain that *Isis Unveiled* contains a mass of original and never hitherto divulged information on occult subjects. That this is so, is proved by the fact that the work has been fully appreciated by all those who have been intelligent enough to discern the kernel, and pay little attention to the shell, to give the preference to the idea and not to the form, regardless of its minor shortcomings. Prepared to take upon myself—*vicariously* as I will show—the sins of all the external, purely literary defects of the work, I defend the ideas and teachings in it, with no fear of being charged with conceit, since *neither ideas nor teachings are mine*, as I have always declared; and I maintain that both are of the greatest value to mystics and students of Theosophy.<sup>54</sup>

As summed up by Olcott, her co-worker on this book:

The truest thing ever said about *Isis* was the expression of an American author that it is “a book with a revolution in it.”<sup>55</sup>

#### NOTES

1. “Introductory,” by Boris de Zirkoff, p. [43], in *Isis Unveiled*, by H. P. Blavatsky, rev. ed., Wheaton, Illinois: Theosophical Publishing House, 1972 (1st ed., 1877); and *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, Wheaton, Illinois: Theosophical Publishing House, vol. 1, p. 302.
2. *Old Diary Leaves*, by Henry Steel Olcott, 2nd ed., Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, vol. 1, p. 294.
3. *The Secret Doctrine*, by H. P. Blavatsky, 1st ed., 1888; rev. ed. [by Boris de Zirkoff] (pagination unchanged), Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1978, vol. 1, p. xxxiv.
4. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 14, p. 431.
5. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, ed. A. T. Barker, 3rd rev. ed., Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1962, p. 201.
6. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 5, p. 221.
7. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 4, p. 184.
8. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 3rd ed., p. 45.



9. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 3rd ed., p. 179.
10. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 3rd ed., p. 127.
11. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 3rd ed., p. 118.
12. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 13, p. 197; see also *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 3rd ed., p. 472.
13. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 13, pp. 198, 201.
14. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 7, p. 50.
15. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 3rd ed., p. 472.
16. *Isis Unveiled*, "Preface," vol. 1, p. vi.
17. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 7, p. 51.
18. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 3rd ed., p. 52.
19. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 3rd ed., p. 300; see also p. 152.
20. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 3rd ed., p. 285; see also *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 7, p. 288.
21. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 3rd ed., p. 179.
22. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 3rd ed., p. 45.
23. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 4, pp. 119, 120.
24. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 4, p. 120; *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, p. 67.
25. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 4, p. 120.
26. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 4, p. 122.
27. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 4, p. 182.
28. *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, p. 351.
29. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 4, p. 184.
30. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 4, p. 184.
31. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 3rd ed., p. 169.
32. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 7, p. 181.
33. *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, p. 346.
34. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 7, p. 183; see note 37 below.
35. *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, p. 347.
36. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 7, p. 184; see note 37 below.
37. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 10, pp. 215-216. These two sentences were here corrected as: "Hindus dread reincarnation *in other and inferior bodies*, of brutes and animals or *transmigration*"; and the "*former life* believed in by Buddhists is not a life in the same cycle and personality."
38. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 10, p. 215.
39. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 10, p. 215.
40. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 10, pp. 215-216.
41. *Old Diary Leaves*, vol. 1, p. 278.
42. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 13, p. 199.

43. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 3rd ed., p. 45.
44. *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, p. 322.
45. *Outlines of the History of Religion*, by C. P. Tiele, London and Boston, 1877, pp. 141-142.
46. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 13, pp. 195-196.
47. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 13, p. 196.
48. *Old Diary Leaves*, vol. 1, p. 211.
49. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 13, p. 192.
50. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 3rd ed., p. 126; see also pp. 103, 111, 127.
51. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 3rd ed., p. 127.
52. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 4, p. 253.
53. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, 3rd ed., pp. 473-474.
54. *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 13, p. 193.
55. *Old Diary Leaves*, vol. 1, p. 297. This American was Dr. Alexander Wilder; see “Introductory” by Boris de Zirkoff, *Isis Unveiled*, p. [51].

[The foregoing article was written by David Reigle for the German study edition of *Isis Unveiled*, and was published in German translation as the “Einführung,” or Introduction, in *Isis Entschleiert*, edited by Hank Troemel, 2003, pp. 25-46. It was also published in the original English in *The High Country Theosophist*, vol. 18, no. 5, Sep./Oct. 2003, pp. 2-15. This online edition is published by Eastern Tradition Research Institute, copyright 2005.]