

had spent the Civil War exposing government corruption and had been one of three investigators into the assassination of President Lincoln and William Quan Judge, a promising young, New York-based lawyer. They called their new organization the Theosophical Society.

After the publication of her two-volume book *Isis Unveiled* (an extended argument that the ancients knew more than the moderns do about the mysteries of life), Blavatsky and Olcott—the Theosophical Twins — went to India, where they established the international headquarters of their Society at Adyar, Madras, (now Chennai) on the southeastern shore of the subcontinent. Ever the subject of controversy and the object of missionary churchmen's enmity, Blavatsky left India in 1885, eventually to settle in London, where she completed her masterwork, *The Secret Doctrine: The synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*.

Blavatsky died in 1891, 123 years ago, but her influence lives on. Her voluminous writings — they fill more than twenty volumes, with several volumes of her letters still being edited — are the source of most modern esoteric ideas. She and her followers popularized in the Western world such Eastern ideas as karma, reincarnation, the subtle body, inner planes, spiritual evolution, evolved human mahatmas or masters, and initiation into a cosmic hierarchy of adepts. Long before Aldous Huxley, she taught the existence of a Perennial Philosophy, an Ancient Wisdom that has existed all over the world since the childhood of humanity, usually in secret form.

That Ancient Wisdom, as she interpreted it, emphasizes the unity of all human beings and indeed of all life on our planet and throughout the universe. It says that life and evolution have a goal, which is increasing awareness, fuller being, and productive joy. It proclaims the ability and responsibility of all persons to determine their own futures, to be their own saviors. At the same time, it stresses the interconnectedness of all people — we suffer one another's pains and benefit from one another's strengths. The ethical keynote of her teaching was altruism — the recognition that the best way to help ourselves is to forget ourselves in helping others.

Helena Blavatsky was no saint. Her emotional ups and downs, her expectation that others would work as tirelessly and unstintingly as she did, her sharp and plain tongue, her skill in managing others, and the demands she