

# L. Frank Baum and Theosophy - Part I.

by John Algeo - USA

The term “theosophy” or “Theosophy” has two meanings, identified in *Merriam-Webster’s 11th Collegiate Dictionary* as “1: teaching about God and the world based on mystical insight [and] 2 often capitalized: the teachings of a modern movement originating in the United States in 1875 and following chiefly Buddhist and Brahmanic theories especially of pantheistic evolution and reincarnation.” Theosophists certainly accept the historical part of the second definition and generally subscribe to all three concepts of pantheism, evolution, and reincarnation. However, they generally regard Theosophical teachings, including the three specifically mentioned as by no means limited to Buddhism and Brahmanism, but rather as the common property of the more general sense of “theosophy,” that is, spiritual teachings about the divine and the mundane that can be found in diverse traditions all over the globe.

All three of those basic concepts are worth considering further. Pantheism is a term formed from Greek “pan” = “all” and “theos” = “god.” In Theosophical use, it is the theory that God and nature are identical, that is, everything in nature is an expression of the divine and the divine ensouls every particle of matter. Incidentally, in this use, the term “theory” denotes a way of viewing the world, being from a Greek term meaning “to look at,” rather than unfounded speculation. In a Theosophical view, evolution is not just biological but cultural, intellectual, and spiritual as well; and reincarnation is the principal means by which human evolution progresses through the ages.

Theosophists regard the theories of pantheism, evolution, and reincarnation as universal ones that can be found in all religious traditions of the world. It is a typical Theosophical view that every traditional religion has two aspects: an outer or exoteric one and an inner or esoteric one. In their exoteric aspects, religions can be very different from one another and often antagonistic as well. They are expressions of the cultures and times in which