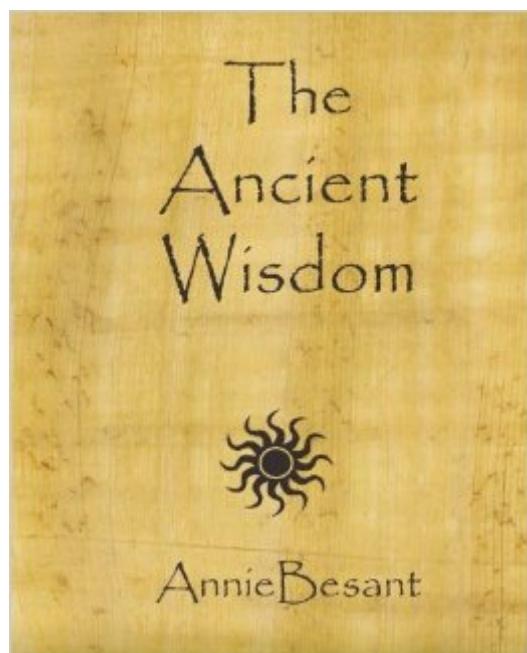


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The Ancient Wisdom



Synopsis

For those intimidated by Madame Blavatsky's massive and complex tome, *The Secret Doctrine*, Annie Besant presents the basic tenets of Theosophical thought in a concise, easy to digest format. While a much easier read, this book still delivers the full spectrum and depth of the Theosophical philosophy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Annie Besant, social reformer and leading Theosophist in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, wrote brilliant and clear texts on many aspects of theosophical cosmology and anthropology. While Blavatsky also wrote clearly (at times), Besant brought the entire legacy of Blavatsky to a new level of articulation and probed into its ramifications. Yet she shows in her masterpiece "The Ancient Wisdom" that she had an independent and creative mind of high order. The book shows how the seven-fold nature of the human self works out its eternal drama in consort with the underlying cosmology that it mirrors. The so-called "higher" triad of the self (spirit, intuition, and mind) is displayed against the so-called "lower" quaternary of the self (lower mental, emotional, etheric, and physical). Unfortunately, in the climate of 1897, still lingering under the repression of the late Victorian era, the anthropological categories get mingled with value categories. Thus we read that the lower dimensions of the self are somehow morally tainted when contrasted to the higher dimensions. By contrast, Sri Aurobindo, writing in an overlapping period, was far less dualistic, refusing to conflate descriptive with honorific categories. This negative dualism haunts much of the

early theosophical literature, but does not seem to be a necessary component. Besant does an excellent job in explaining the twin concepts of karma and reincarnation, convincing me that this model may be the best that our various traditions have to offer concerning justice and the complexity of the afterlife. Her discussion of the astral plane (certainly one issue that would cause strong resistance in the contemporary mind-set) opens up some vistas that are worthy of sustained probing.

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