



The Upper Triad Material

Topical Issue 7.1

Manifestation

Reincarnation and Transition



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Manifestation

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Chapter 7.1

Manifestation



Reincarnation and Transition

- Manifestation as it pertains to purpose is considered in Volume 1 of the Upper Triad Material. Manifestation in terms of cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis is also considered in Volume 1. Here in Volume 7 of the Upper Triad Material, manifestation is considered in the context of a field of activity (for experience and expression), and in the practical considerations or reincarnation and transition, rather than in its panoramic sense.
- The details of panoramic form-manifestation are described more aptly in terms of cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis, e.g., in *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception* by Max Heindel and in *First Principles of Theosophy* by C. Jinarajadasa.
- Manifestation proceeds in an ordered and cyclic manner, both with regard to matter and form and with regard to the consciousness that relates through matter and form in order to acquire experience and develop in consciousness. All is an expression of the logos.

Manifestation

God (purpose) is the source of manifestation. The manifestation of the universe proceeds in a more or less orderly manner, according to the purpose (evolutionary intention) of God: universal manifestation proceeds according to the plan embodied in the emergence (reflection) of life in the highest sense, and successive cosmic (solar) (planetary) manifestation proceeds according to the plan as understood and conditioned at that level. And the human being on its level proceeds according to that part of the plan that is embodied in the higher self (soul) and humanity as a lifewave.

Manifestation thus proceeds as a consequence of and in accordance with underlying purpose. First the fabric of the universe is evoked. Then various (cosmic, solar, planetary) logoi emerge from the Godhead as manifestation is induced within the fabric of the universe. Various lifewaves are successively differentiated within the one life in order to evolve in consciousness and contribute to the (higher) evolution of the one life. Similarly, various lives are successively differentiated within each lifewave. Most (all) lives are composite.

Manifestation can be viewed in two principal ways, (1) in the sense of life and purpose and (2) in the sense of the order and details of material manifestation (form) as a basis for the evolution of consciousness. The second is the natural reflection of the first. The form aspect of manifestation is governed or conditioned by the third ray (of three) or the seventh ray (of seven), while the life (purpose) aspect of manifestation is governed or conditioned by the first ray. The life aspect is concerned with purpose (the underlying force of manifestation) (that purpose being the evolution of consciousness of all implied (induced) lives) and the process of evolution (through the seven rays) (cosmogogenesis), while the form aspect is concerned with the fabric of (material) manifestation in consciousness (e.g., cosmic fire, the seven planes).

Manifestation proceeds with underlying purpose and underlying (consequential) order. The "force" emerging from the Godhead conveys some order to manifestation. That order is the result of the qualification of matter (and consciousness) (and life) by that purpose as conveyed through the various laws

or conditioning factors. More-or-less-orderly implies an underlying order but with considerable freedom or flexibility in the details or working out (fulfillment) of the evolutionary impulse. "God" has purpose and methods (and means), but sends forth the conditioned and qualified evolutionary impulse in the form of intention-without-all-the-details-worked-out. Under cosmic law, the experience of manifestation leads to fulfillment of the objectives of manifestation. But those objectives are subjective and qualitative, rather than concrete and detailed. This flexibility is necessary to the fulfillment of the implied objectives.

Manifestation is an impulse. It is a sending forth on the part of "God" of a force that evokes all of the details of manifestation. That impulse (force) (energy) is eventually expended (fulfilled) and returns to the Godhead enriched by virtue of its passage (experience). On each level, manifestation is actually a succession of impulses, each of which has some implied or perceived duration (from the lower perspective). Everything that is induced within the field of manifestation (including the field itself) is contained within that impulse. Thus, everything returns to the Godhead, in some form or essence or another (albeit each in its enriched but unmanifested condition).

† Commentary No. 57

Cosmogogenesis

The nature of the manifestation (the coming into being) of the universe is quite simple (perfect) in concept, but quite complex when regarded in its totality. The story of manifestation begins with the absolute (or absolute being), the boundless and unmanifested entity of which the universe is only the reflection thereof. Within that boundless and unquestionable essence is the result of earlier manifestation. From the absolute, at the very dawn of each great cycle of manifestation, proceeds the supreme being (a differentiated being), the architect of the universe, manifesting as a supreme trinity. Within that being is the essence of a host of lesser lives on many levels, the matrices of further manifestation based on earlier experience and development. Manifestation proceeds along two simultaneous lines of force, that of life and that of form (matter), together producing consciousness.

The universal root-substance is set into vibration (motion) and the various planes of consciousness come into existence (in a septenary fashion) as manifestation proceeds. Each major cycle (for form as well as for life) consists of differentiation (involution) (multiplicity), balance (karmic adjustment) (experience), synthesis (integration) (evolution) (unification), and obscuration (liberation) (abstraction) (perfection) (completion). At the fullest extent of manifestation, matter (spirit) exists in differentiated form on seven great cosmic planes of consciousness. Each plane of human consciousness (physical, emotional, and mental) is only one of seven sub-planes within the lowest cosmic plane. Each major level of differentiated matter is controlled (invoked) (created) (evoked) by the corresponding major level of differentiated life.

The differentiation of life proceeds from the trinity (the three rays of aspect) to the septenate (the seven rays), each being further differentiated by threes and sevens. The supreme being exists first as a triplicity and then as a septenate of supreme logoi. A universal logos differentiates itself into a triplicity and seven cosmic logoi (seven great centers of being). Each of the cosmic logoi is a constellation of forces. Each cosmic logos lives through seven solar logoi, using seven solar systems as its vehicle. The solar logos lives through seven planetary logoi (the seven spirits before the throne), using seven planetary schemes as its vehicle. Similarly, a man (human monad) lives through seven principles and seven psychic centers.

The duration of the existence of a solar logos is three successive incarnations (solar systems). The duration for a planetary logos is one solar incarnation. Similarly, the duration of the human monad is one planetary scheme. Each solar incarnation is a mahamanvantara (one-hundred years of Brahma). Each of the seven planetary schemes consists of seven chains (seven days of creation). During each chain, lifewaves within the planetary life unfold through seven rounds or revolutions about seven globes (planetary vehicles).

Each greater and lesser cycle of manifestation constitutes a day of activity and a night of rest and assimilation. There are universal days and nights, cosmic days and nights, etc. The seven days of creation are the seven chains of the Earth planetary scheme (of which the present Earth chain is the fourth day of creation). Throughout the cosmos, the cycles within cycles go on and on, as the

breath of life is alternately sent forth and recalled. The entire structure of manifestation (from logoc levels through the various schemes, chains, rounds, and globes) (for each monadic impulse) is a single thread of life.

† Commentary No. 79

The Planetary Scheme

The story of creative manifestation is the story of the unfoldment of the solar logos, through differentiation and integration (synthesis), through the experience and activity of the seven great days of manifestation. A planetary scheme is the experience and cyclic progression (pattern) of a host of lifewaves bound together within a great life (a planetary logos) for the duration of a solar incarnation. The planetary scheme experiences the seven creative days as seven chains of cyclic activity.

Each chain (corresponding numerologically to a day of manifestation) is a chain of seven globes (planets) through (around) which the various inherent life-waves progress (evolve). A lifewave begins on the first globe of a chain, then experiences each of the globes in succession seven times, making seven rounds or revolutions of the seven globes to complete the chain. At the end of each chain there is a night of rest and the transference of the life onto the following chain, for further experience. The seven globes of a chain are centered on various levels (planes) of consciousness. The first and seventh globes are on the highest level for a particular chain); the second and sixth are on the next lower level; likewise for the third and fifth globes even lower; while the fourth globe is centered upon the lowest plain for the chain. For example, the planet Earth is the fourth (lowest) globe of its chain and manifests as low as the chemical region of the physical plane. The third and fifth globes of the Earth chain do not manifest on dense physical levels, but have the etheric region of the physical plane for their lowest expression (field of experience). Likewise, the second and sixth globes of the Earth chain are astral in lowest substance and the first and seventh globes are of concrete mental matter in their lowest expression.

Similarly, each chain of globes is centered on some plane of consciousness. The first four chains of a planetary scheme are chains of descent, centered on

successively lower levels. The fifth, sixth, and seventh chains (ascent) are centered on the same levels as the third, second, and first, respectively. The physical Earth is the fourth globe of the fourth chain in our planetary scheme. The fourth (lowest) globe of the third and fifth chains (in our scheme) are etheric rather than dense physical. And it is the fourth globe of the second (and sixth) chain which is astral (and it is the fourth globe of the first and seventh chains which is mental in substance).

Each lifewave passes through a kingdom of nature in each chain. During the first, second, and third chains, the lives that are now experiencing the human (self-conscious) kingdom passed through the mineral (trance-like), plant (dreamless sleep), and animal (dream) stages of consciousness (kingdoms). These passages through the lower kingdoms were quite unlike the experience of the present lower kingdoms, for the conditions earlier were far different and non-physical. Each turn of the spiral (round, globe, or chain) progressively offers new conditions for the evolving lifewaves.

Our present planetary lifewaves are in the fourth round (on the fourth globe) of the Earth chain. For humanity, each passage upon a globe may be divided into seven epochs or root-races. From root-races to rounds and globes to chains, each planetary scheme is an intricate and complex pattern (though simple in concept) of evolutionary experience for lifewaves of varying degrees of consciousness. The cycles of days (activity) and nights (rest) gradually merge into greater periods until comes the synthesis of the various planetary schemes and the ultimate withdrawal of the logos from the present incarnation.

Section 7.11



The Field of Manifestation

- The seven planes of consciousness provide the field for the evolution of consciousness, through human activity, experience, and expression. The lower planes of the personality constitute the objective world while the higher planes of the soul constitute the world of inner relationship.
- The lowest plane of human endeavor is the superficially well-known physical plane, including both dense physical and etheric regions. The next (higher) level is the astral or emotional plane, where most people function without being consciously aware of the astral plane itself. Likewise the next higher plane is the mental plane, with its concrete mental region of intellectual activity and its abstract mental region of non-intellectual endeavor. Beyond the mental plane are the buddhic plane (spiritual intuition) and the atmic plane (spiritual will).
- The human personality functions more or less unconsciously on physical, emotional, and intellectual levels. The human soul functions contemplatively and impersonally (without thinking or feeling) through atma-buddhi-manas. The human monad exists (resides) beyond the levels of the soul and, like the soul, does not enter directly into "human" experience.
- While the seven planes are described more fundamentally in Volume 1 of the Upper Triad Material, here in Volume 7 the seven planes are considered more as a field of endeavor, a background for experience and expression, i.e., things "happen" within the seven planes of consciousness and all that "happens" is inter-related and within the scheme of purpose outlined in Volume 1.

The Seven Planes

The world of human existence encompasses seven major levels or planes of consciousness. The first (highest) plane is the source of human existence; the second is the plane of the (human) monad; and the lower five planes form the present domain of human evolution and range of human consciousness. Most of humanity express themselves only on the lowest three levels, and have awareness on only the lowest (physical) plane. Each of the seven planes has seven subdivisions (sub-planes). Each of the forty-nine sub-planes is formed of matter of a particular density and polarization. Each successively higher sub-plane is formed of finer or more subtle matter. Each plane is a world or dimension in itself, having a distinct polarization, yet interpenetrating the other planes. There are no "higher" or "lower" realms, simply many coexistent dimensions. The terms "higher" and "lower" are used to refer to the relative quality (consciousness) of the matter.

The lowest world (the seventh or physical plane) has two major divisions. The lowest three sub-planes comprise the dense physical or chemical region that is characterized by the physical matter known to modern science. The upper four sub-planes comprise the etheric region. The matter of the four ethers is quite physical, but it is of a much finer nature. The etheric region is a world of physical plane forces and energies. Much of the phenomena in the physical world finds its force or intermediate cause in the etheric region. In fact, most of the physical life support processes are etheric functions.

The next higher plane (the sixth) is called the astral or emotional plane (the desire world). It is characterized as a sea of emotional energies; it also has seven subdivisions of matter. The lower sub-planes are of the coarse matter of the unpleasant (selfish) emotions. The higher sub-planes are of finer matter of the more mature emotions. This sea of emotional energies is interpreted through color by those who have astral vision. Each hue or tone indicates a quality of emotion. But the clairvoyant vision is quite colored by the individual's own emotional nature and perspective. The astral plane, like the etheric region of the physical plane, can be considered as an energy field. The

astral world is governed to a high degree by magnetic attraction and repulsion; similar emotions are attractive and dissimilar feelings are repulsive.

The world beyond the astral is the mental or manasic plane (the fifth). It has two major divisions: the lower region is that of concrete thought and the higher region is that of abstract (formless) thought. The loftier thoughts find themselves in the higher sub-planes. The fourth world is the plane of buddhi or intuition. Above (beyond) the buddhic plane is the plane of atma (spiritual will) or nirvana (the third plane). The second plane is the home world of the human spirit, the monadic plane. And finally, the highest plane of the seven is the world of God, the relative source of all lesser manifestation.

The physical plane is characterized by time and space. In the astral world there is only a slight, rather vague correspondence to time and space. Beyond the astral, time and space have little significance, if any. The essence of each plane is energy; spirit and matter are the two relative poles of energy. Spirit is the highest aspect of matter, and matter is the lowest aspect of spirit, by degrees. Matter is a momentary expression, while spirit is eternal. The highest worlds are created first, the lowest worlds last. The lowest planes are the first to disintegrate and pass into obscurity, while the highest planes are the last. The septenary manifestation of matter comes and goes with the breath of Brahma, but God, the absolute, persists.

† Commentary No. 1003

Manifestation and the Seven Planes

In support of the manifestation of life (through the seven rays and lives within lives), there must first be, for convenience, an underlying fabric of consciousness within which to manifest (for experience and expression), for each unit of life and its associated consciousness are merely induced within the underlying fabric. That fabric of manifestation is constituted as seven planes of consciousness (and seven sub-planes of consciousness within each plane) which are inherently related one to another and qualified in various ways by the seven ray lives.

From the standpoint of manifestation, each successive (lower) plane of consciousness is relatively coarser or denser. Higher planes are not "higher" in any spatial sense, but simply more refined in the material sense. But although planes of consciousness may be viewed materialistically (and improperly) in terms of density of matter, they are more properly viewed in terms of dimensions of reality, where the higher planes are simply more subtle. All is primarily a matter of perspective, with planes of consciousness being able to be perceived as matter, consciousness, or spirit, depending on the point of view. The material perspective is simply the most misleading (and only applies more or less correctly to the lowest or coarsest levels). Even the perspective of consciousness is not as potent as the perspective of spirit (being), but the perspective of consciousness is the more practical way of viewing the fabric of manifestation.

Manifestation begins at the highest or deepest level (plane of consciousness) as the absolute or unmanifested "life" induces the fabric of the universe in that highest sense, then manifested "life" successively differentiates the fabric of the universe until there is a full spectrum of seven planes and seven sub-planes within seven planes (and seven sub-sub-planes, etc.). The panorama of manifestation of life and consciousness actually unfolds synergistically with the unfolding (differentiation of the) planes of consciousness. As the highest plane is able to support consciousness (the experience and expression of some lifewave), so does that life emerge on that level. Likewise at every successively lower level until a full spectrum of manifested life is evident.

These are, of course, merely perspectives on manifestation. In actuality, manifestation is multi-dimensional and simultaneous. But in order to understand the patterns and their implications for evolving life (consciousness), it helps to see the patterns in some sequential sense (and there is a natural and apparent sequential pattern). The panorama of lives can be viewed discretely (as each lifewave (life) constitutes some entity) or it can be viewed as a continuum (as each lifewave (life) is connected to both preceding and succeeding (and every other) lifewave (life)). Lives appropriate (create) (induce) forms within the field of matter. Those forms are themselves lives on some level.

Thus the seven planes of consciousness form a field of manifestation for the experience and expression of a diversity of lifewaves within lifewaves (lives

within lifewaves and lives within lives). And the seven planes are also ensouled as lives (since all is life). When the conglomeration of “user” lives have expended their evolutionary impulse, the process of ultimate assimilation (withdrawal) takes place, and “user” lives are withdrawn from manifestation as the fabric of manifestation (“server” lives) is (are) dissolved (withdrawn) to successively higher (deeper) levels. Until the unmanifested state is again realized.

† Commentary No. 1008

The Physical Plane

The physical plane is the lowest, most “material” of the seven planes of consciousness that form the field of manifestation for the human lifewave (and other lives). It is the plane upon which the human being naturally perceives, even though the process of perception involves both emotional and mental levels of consciousness.

The physical plane consists of seven sub-planes of consciousness, the lower three being considered the “dense” physical region and the upper four being considered the etheric region. The dense physical region is the familiar realm of more-or-less objective physical human experience and expression. It is important to humanity only in terms of the forms that it provides and the experience (on higher (emotional and mental) levels) that it facilitates. The etheric region is more vital in the sense that it is the realm of physical plane forces that underlie all of physical plane phenomena. It is the etheric region that provides prana or vitality for subsistence on physical levels.

However, the physical plane is taken for granted and is very poorly (incorrectly) perceived by the vast majority of humanity, and the etheric region is (for virtually all people) hardly perceived at all. Most people perceive the physical plane as the only reality, with emotional and mental processes being part of the physical plane experience (i.e., emotional and mental phenomena are usually but incorrectly perceived as “physical” plane phenomena). By taking the physical plane merely at face (apparent) value, unconscious assumptions are made which lead to substantial misunderstanding of cause and effect relationships that broadly condition the human experience. By only viewing “life” in the apparent

(obvious) physical perspective, one is very substantially limited in one's ability to understand experience. Cause and effect relationships, for example, almost always involve aspects (factors) on etheric, emotional, and/or mental levels. The mind and the brain are actually two separate but related instruments, one utilizing the other. The brain has no function without the mind, but the mind can exist and function quite nicely without the brain.

By viewing the (dense) physical plane as the only reality, one fails to appreciate the role of the etheric, emotional (astral), and mental planes. The physical plane is almost entirely a plane of effects, with virtually no causes. Without appreciation for the relationships between physical, emotional, and mental levels (and the fact that they are three separate but related dimensions in consciousness), psychological confusion (self-deception) results. Of course that is part of the human experience, but the evolving student must eventually transcend these physical plane limitations and illusions. By placing the physical plane in the context of seven planes of consciousness (and by placing the physical body in the context of seven bodies or vehicles in consciousness), one is eventually able to properly recognize cause and effect relationships and facilitate evolution (experience, expression, and service).

The results of scientific research into the fundamentals of material existence is leading to a more widespread appreciation of the insubstantiality of the physical world, but the "links" to other planes are not yet so readily apparent. The role of emotional and mental "causes" of physical plane consequences is beginning to be appreciated in the medical community, but the perspective is still substantially limited by presumptions about the physical plane. The materialistic perspective must eventually yield to a broader and more comprehensive view, one that places the physical plane in its proper place, one that transcends the illusion of separate and material existence.

The Astral Plane

The astral plane is the region of consciousness that exists between the physical plane and the mental plane. The astral (emotional) world is coexistent with the other planes through interpenetration. Atoms of astral matter are similar to physical atoms except that they are much finer in texture, vibrate at a different (higher) level (octave), and are polarized quite differently. The astral realm (the desire world) is a sea of fluctuating emotional energies (feelings). The lower sub-planes of the astral world are vibrations of rather coarse, unrefined, selfish, materialistic, or unpleasant emotions (relating closely to the physical world). The higher sub-planes are vibrations of the more pleasant emotions and of aspiration and devotion.

The astral world is also the world of dreams; for when a person sleeps the desire body (astral body) is utilized to reflect the sights and sounds of the astral plane, though in a rather illusionary manner. Astral vision differs markedly from the physical vision, and considerable training, discipline, and experience is required before any meaningful information can be brought back from the astral plane. Psychics with the astral vision (clairvoyance) or hearing (clairaudience) are usually untrained and their perceptions are normally quite colored (distorted) by their own personality thought-forms and feelings. The desire world is filled with glamour (illusion on astral levels) and therefore most astral impressions are quite misleading and extremely unreliable. Only where the emotions are purified and the thinking is refined (clear) (without any bias) can the individual be properly trained to function effectively and consciously on the astral plane. The serious spiritual student is hardly interested in astral phenomena, unless he has been properly trained to work constructively in the astral body. The serious student is not really interested in phenomena at all.

There are three kinds of entities which function (consciously or unconsciously) on the astral plane: human, non-human, and artificial. Each kind has a variety of types and levels. Humans may function on the astral plane during sleep or after death, or unconsciously (or consciously) with the generation of feelings, desires, and emotions. There are many non-human types who live and work on astral levels; some are rather unevolved (such as the astral elementals), and

some are quite intelligent (such as the higher order of devas (angels) who do much constructive work). Artificial astral entities are created quite easily by human emotion and feeling, which vitalizes astral matter. As emotions are generated (good or bad) (consciously or otherwise), so are astral matter and entities of similar quality attracted.

Astral phenomena (forms and energies) are rather transparent and colorful (either dull or bright, depending on quality). Each emotion or feeling has a characteristic vibration that can be interpreted in terms of color. The translation of that color to physical brain consciousness, however, may be misleading. The colors within the aura (astral body) are indicative of the condition (and quality) of the emotional nature. The lower (higher) emotions and desires are represented by relatively coarse (refined) colors.

In contrast to the etheric (vital) body which is the same shape as the dense physical body (but a few inches larger), the astral body is an ovoid which completely envelops the lower bodies. The astral body (the aura) is the seat of the emotional and aspirational life; and in the relatively evolved humans, it is a rather well organized and stable vehicle, radiant with the higher emotion, a controlled instrument for experience and expression.

† Commentary No. 15

The Mental Plane

The mental or manasic plane is that plane or region of consciousness that exists between the astral (emotional) and the buddhic (intuitional) planes, while simultaneously coexisting and interpenetrating the other six planes. The mental plane is divided into seven grades or sub-planes of mental substance (matter), and into two regions of thought. The lower mental world is the region of concrete thought where the highest aspect of the human personality functions. The lower or concrete mind is the mortal mind that uses the physical brain as its instrument. The higher mental world is the region of abstract thought where the lowest aspect of the human soul functions. The higher or abstract mind is the (relatively) immortal mind. Manas (the mental principle) is actually the link or bridge between the personality and the soul, the principle through which the personality is integrated and aligned with the soul.

The lower mind is used to calm and discipline (control) the emotional nature. The higher mind is used to bring the lower mind under the control of the soul. The lower mind is used to synthesize and integrate the personality into a single vibration, that the personality might be used more effectively. The higher mind is used to bridge the gap between buddhi (intuition) and the lower self. For this reason, the utilization of abstract and subjective studies and meditations encourages the building of the vital bridge between a soul and its personality. Though mental development is a prerequisite for intuitional development, the mind (the head) should be properly balanced with the heart. As these two aspects (head and heart) develop, the student should be guided by spiritual motive and common sense rather than rationalization. True reasoning is buddhi-manas, the abstract mind enlightened by the intuition.

The emotional, mental, and intuitional development of the spiritual student should proceed at a natural pace (based upon experience, conscience, and humanitarian work). Where there is a forced development or development without proper (unselfish) motive, there are usually resultant dangers and problems (such as over-stimulation, loss of self-control, and an exaggerated sense of ego). The lower mind is a delicate instrument that can be used constructively or destructively. The higher, abstract mind is free from the selfish, critical, and separative thought vibrations that the concrete mind is capable of.

The lower mind must be properly cultivated, for conscious and unconscious thoughts can have quite potent effects on relationships and experiences. As the mind is properly disciplined and balanced, the student can progress more reasonably. Man is slowly becoming polarized on the mental plane and must be encouraged to be careful in the creation of thought-forms. The effect of a person's thinking will generally appear in the emotional and physical life. Good, sound, positive thinking encourages health; while bad, negative, selfish thinking encourages disease on mental, emotional, and physical levels.

Man is becoming a creator. His creative thoughts are archetypes which precede and condition physical manifestation. The mental plane is the realm of consciousness that includes thought-forms that have been consciously or unconsciously created. Much of man's misery comes from careless thinking.

The evolving spiritual student is cautioned to think consciously, guard against careless and critical thoughts, and use the mind constructively. While ordinary man thinks (and thereby activates mental energies), the evolved man (the adept) functions consciously on the mental plane (which is an altogether higher level of experience than merely thinking). Such an adept is as aware on the mental plane as the ordinary man is aware on the physical plane.



Section 7.12



Reincarnation

- While many may think of reincarnation as a theory that has yet to be demonstrated or proven, in the tradition of the ancient wisdom, reincarnation is a demonstrated and proven fact. It is simply a matter of personal experience (realization). There are intellectual arguments and rationalizations, but it is only direct experience that really matters.
- The human being is born into this world in order to evolve in consciousness. At the end of each lifetime or incarnation, the human being withdraws for a period of rest and assimilation before beginning another lifetime with a new personality. Thus life (evolution) proceeds through a succession of lifetimes, and the essence of previous experience, in the form of conscience, wisdom, abilities, etc., is carried forth from lifetime to lifetime, ever onward and upward in the progressive, evolutionary sense. Throughout the process of reincarnation there is the balancing factor of karma.

Reincarnation

With so much to learn in the vast school of life on earth, and with human perfection as man's goal for graduation, it seems unlikely that man could master all the lessons and accomplishments in merely one lifetime. It seems especially impossible when one considers how short the length of a human lifetime can be, such as for an individual who dies prematurely (for whatever (karmic) reasons). Nor does it seem fair (at first glance) that one might have a few years of experience (opportunity) while another might have many. Even a full lifetime seems too short a period of time for individual evolution.

The issue of justness also brings into consideration the extremes of opportunity and abundance versus deprivation and limitation which exist in the world. The learning conditions in one lifetime appear to be so unequal for men, that unless man had more than one set of circumstances for schooling, life would seem incredibly unfair and God very unjust.

The Ancient Wisdom teaches, in fact, precisely that idea that man does have the opportunity of more than one lifetime on earth to master the lessons of life. The teachings state that human evolution is a series of rebirths on earth until all that is necessary for man to experience and to learn and develop has been completed. Thus a myriad of conditions and circumstances are faced by each man which contain all the opportunities for necessary growth. The degree of effort that a man applies to his schooling determines how long (the number of incarnations) it takes for him to complete the various grades and levels.

The aspect of a man that is reborn or reincarnated into earth life is his personality. The ancient teachings state that man is composed of three different aspects. (1) The highest aspect of man is the spirit aspect, which is composed of a divine spark of God known as a monad. The spirit or monad is beyond man's real understanding or accessing until he is fully evolved in human consciousness. (2) The intermediate aspect of man is a reflection of the monad, which is the man's soul, also called the higher self. The soul and its wisdom and guidance can be accessed and known by man as he purifies and refines himself. (3) The lowest aspect of man is his personality, known as the lower

self. The personality consists of a man's physical body, his emotional nature, and his concrete mind.

Who and what is man? Most people (and modern science) only recognize and deal with external man, the lower man (the personality). But man is much more than that -- he is divine. However, this divinity exists as a yet unfulfilled potential waiting to be developed and unfolded. Man's personality is the aspect of himself that dies after death, but his immortal soul remains to absorb the wisdom assimilated from the earthly experiences. The soul is the repository of all talents, virtues, and development. These will be used again as the soul creates another personality for yet another incarnation in life on earth. The process continues again and again until the need for further experience, learning, and incarnations has been met and human perfection is achieved.

The evolution of consciousness is a glorious and progressive process, moving ever upward and onward. A distortion of this concept called transmigration exists in which a human soul is said to be reborn into sub-human forms instead of human. But that is simply not possible, as it would be a step backward not forward.

Reincarnation (rebirth) goes hand in hand with karma, as the law of cause and effect draws a soul back repeatedly into physical expression to learn more and to balance the effects the individuality has created in previous lifetimes. Because of this, an observer cannot always recognize the karmic cause of a particular result in an incarnation if the causative factor occurred in a previous lifetime.

And many effects are the composite consequences of more than one cause, which further complicates the delineation of cause and effect. One can only know that there is perfect justice under the law of karma, and the cause exists even if he cannot perceive it currently. There is an accumulation of karma to be carried over into future incarnations because less evolved man has little wisdom and creates many more inappropriate results than he can offset in one lifetime.

For the generally materialistic Western man, ideas about karma and reincarnation may seem quite new and foreign (although nonetheless intuitively valid). Western man might be surprised to know that a lot of the world already believe in these concepts. They are taught in Eastern religions such as

Hinduism and Buddhism, and have been accepted by many great thinkers throughout history.

In the process of reincarnation, the soul is the aspect of man which before rebirth subjectively (qualitatively) outlines in a broad manner the plan of life, what lessons are to be learned, what qualities are to be strengthened, what failings are to be overcome, and what ideally should be accomplished in an upcoming incarnation. The soul has within itself the necessary wisdom for the personality to deal with any challenging situations if the personality can refine and quiet itself enough to achieve a measure of alignment with the refined soul consciousness. Daily meditation is a process by which this connection can begin to be bridged.

The soul may program for inclusion in the incarnation certain talents, abilities, and encouraging circumstances, all earned and merited by karma. Conversely, it may plan certain physical, emotional, or mental limitations or defects to be experienced by the individual to prompt growth in some area of the personality. Thus a blind person, for example, might develop an exceptional sense of hearing or touch. Or such a handicap may draw forth outstanding inner awareness, and heart qualities such as love, compassion, and goodwill. Then the "handicap" becomes an opportunity for growth because of the individual's (appropriate) attitude and response to the challenge.

Living in poverty, or in a family, work, or national situation where there is strife and oppression may not be easy. But the lives of numerous men and women in the past have shown how much stronger and more aware they became for having experienced and surmounted the more difficult problems. And in doing so, they no doubt balanced some of their individual karmic debt as well.

Additionally, in certain cases of national or group strife, the more evolved individuals might even have helped offset a small measure of group karma as well, for all groups, including humanity as a whole, experience the karmic consequences of their actions and learn through the effects. As the more spiritually aware individuals balance their own karma, they naturally become service oriented and deal with group karma.

Opportunities small or great must be used and not ignored or they will result in further limitation. Whether there is abundance or scarcity, a person is responsible for using resources as wisely as possible in accordance with his quality of consciousness, his awareness, and consistent with his potential for service to others.

Since evolution in a new incarnation generally takes up at the stage it ended in the previous one, the factors of heredity and environment are dictated largely by past karma (and for the more evolved individual, considerations of spiritual service obligations to be met). The soul selects the physical plane parents according to the quality of parents merited by the individual and the quality of parents available. The incarnating individual brings forward a combination of hereditary factors both from the parents and himself. Frequently members of a person's family or some of his new associates will be individuals he has met and known before in previous lifetimes. Bonds of love or of hate draw them back together, as do unresolved energies where debts remain to be paid and energies balanced.

The soul also chooses the astrological factors, the time and place of birth, which set into motion the environmental circumstances and potentials to unfold. Because man has free will in accordance with his karma and quality of consciousness, much of what unfolds will be in like measure subject to self-determinism. After he has reincarnated, it is up to the individual to study himself and ascertain his strengths, weaknesses, and what might be the purpose of the incarnation. He must endeavor to know himself. Meditative reflection is quite helpful in the undertaking.

A person may wonder if he has indeed lived many lifetimes on earth, why doesn't he remember it? The memory of the previous existences remains with the soul consciousness. In each rebirth, the personality is a new one, with a newly created physical body and a new brain. Since the new brain has not recorded the previous past life experience, it cannot remember it. Moreover, the details of past lifetimes are not that important. What is significant are the virtues, talents, and quality of consciousness developed in them. All of that is assimilated into the soul to be added to its accumulation of wisdom and quality.

If man were aware of all the details of his past lives, he would be overwhelmed with all that he has experienced -- the memories, the pain, the suffering, the anguish, the unfortunate matters that he can no longer do anything about, in addition to the happy occurrences that are past. It would distract him from his current life and events and relationships that he can and indeed should have an impact on now. He must currently do what is before him to do. Man must achieve the most he can from his present incarnation, and know that in doing so, the past and the future will take care of themselves. For by living a spiritual life in the present, he will assuredly balance the misdeeds of the past, as well as appropriately create bountiful opportunities for the future.



Reincarnation and Karma

The laws of reincarnation and karma are two of the most fundamental laws concerning human life. Both are subsidiary laws to the law of evolution. The law of reincarnation implies that an evolving human life (soul) must be reborn on this earth time and time again until that soul has reached relative perfection as far as human evolution is concerned (in the physical, emotional, and mental worlds). Reincarnation supports evolution, and not retrogression or transmigration. A human soul cannot inhabit a subhuman body; that would be contrary to the laws of evolution, which require continual (though gradual) progress, onward and upward along the spiral circuit.

An individual human soul is created (appropriated by the monad) at the moment of individualization (the attainment of self-consciousness). From that moment on until the soul transcends the lower worlds, it seeks (under law) to experience and to evolve through a long succession of lives in this world. The soul is the individuality that incarnates. The soul creates a new personality (based on experience and karma) for each life, and that personality is subject to the law of karma (consequence).

The law of karma provides the basic urge toward evolution and enlightenment. It is the law of cause and effect, the great teacher which wisely yields the experiences and opportunities needed (and earned) because of causal energies. In each lifetime, every action, behavior, feeling, thought, and motive sets karmic forces (causes) into motion. Through ignorance much karma is created in the early lives. Karma teaches man to live in harmony with spiritual law, and through the results (effects) received, the needed lessons are learned (consciously or otherwise). The more closely the student lives in harmony with cosmic law, the greater will be the progress toward the higher consciousness. As a man evolves he begins to consciously set forces into motion that will bring the talents and opportunities that are needed. Each seed (cause or action) bears an appropriate fruit (result or effect). Thoughts and feelings result in tendencies and capacities. Experience becomes wisdom and conscience. Injuries (physical, emotional, or mental) inflicted upon others (or self) and rebellion against law (conscious or unconscious) result in physical, emotional, and mental diseases

and limitations. Man is responsible for all that he is, all that he has, and all that he does, on all levels.

The reincarnating soul brings with it the accumulation of karma, though normally only a portion of that karma is to be fulfilled in any one lifetime. Perfect justice (in the broadest sense) rules over all of humanity. The physical body, the emotional nature, and the mental capacity of the incarnating soul are only as good as karma determines. Likewise the friendships, experiences, and opportunities are also earned. The law of karma cannot be interfered with. However, changes in behavior and thinking will lead to changes in the results. Karma is the sum of all forces generated that are as yet unfulfilled. Through free will a person can add new positive causes which will modify the final outcome (which is a function of time). Man creates karma through free will; destiny is simply the consequence.

The results of actions in the present life may appear partially or fully within the present lifetime, or they may appear later. Karma is neither good nor bad; karma is not retribution or punishment; karma is the divine force that teaches, and it leads the evolving life into knowledge, wisdom, and relative perfection. Through the working out of karma, sins are forgiven. By living in harmony with law, limitation is overcome and self-mastery is achieved.

† Commentary No. 301

Recapitulation 1

In biological terms, recapitulation involves the repetition in an individual of the phylo-genetic history of its group; i.e., ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. This means simply that the individual development repeats the evolutionary history of its ancestors in an abbreviated (accelerated) form. This process (recapitulation) is actually far broader in scope than the biological, for it is an inherent and crucial aspect of (evolutionary) progress on all levels, as in each incarnation (and in each lesser cycle), the individual (and the group) recapitulates earlier experience (of greater cycles) so that experience can be reinforced and so that the products (abilities) of the experience can be made available in the current stage of development.

On individual terms, the guiding force behind this progress is the soul, though the progress is outwardly achieved through the personality (on physical, emotional, and mental levels). On a higher level, the overall aim of recapitulation is the achievement of relative perfection as an integrated life (lifewave) as part of the greater plan (of evolutionary enlightenment). History repeats itself in many ways, in the case of the individual with regard to his own particular heritage, and in the case of the individual (and group) with regard to group heritage. Repetition also constitutes a test for the respective individual (or group), an opportunity to demonstrate successful incorporation of the lessons previously learned, or at least to reinforce the earlier lessons.

The relentless progressive cyclic pattern of development is necessary to evolution to allow for proper assimilation of experience, proper guidance of development, and effective renewal of the evolutionary impulse (energy) (as energy is expended by experience and progress). Were it not for the cyclic pattern, very little progress would be made before the form would become imbedded in the inertia of the lower worlds. Therefore, recapitulation is a necessary first order of business at the beginning of each sojourn (incarnation) in order for the individual (or group) to reach the point (place) of development (awareness) reached in the preceding lifetime. In early incarnations (of each major stage in development), the bulk of the time is spent in recapitulation, but as progress is made momentum is achieved and the portion of the lifetime given to essentially new experience (further development) increases.

Though recapitulation is important, some new development may proceed simultaneously with the intermediate and final stages of recapitulatory experience. Many of the evolutionary cycles within cycles overlap in terms of influence, as a succeeding cycle actually begins its ascent relative to the decline of the preceding cycle. The nominal duration of any cycle (individual incarnation) is a relative function of the individual's ability and responsiveness to the evolutionary opportunity (karma); i.e., death (transition) occurs (on the average) (discounting over-riding karmic consequences) when the individual has reached a practical limit, where progress has slowed or stalled by concretion of the respective bodies (depending on the stage of development).

Since the individual (life) is irrevocably interrelated with the group (humanity), the evolutionary experience (heritage) of the group is also reflected in the recapitulation of the individual (and, conversely, the experience of the individual is contributed to the overall experience of the group). Evolution is a continuous building process, an expansion of (group) consciousness in which the various individuals are elements of a much larger framework, where (group) momentum is increased as a foundation is achieved on one plane of consciousness and as development is begun on the next higher level.

† Commentary No. 305

Recapitulation 2

Recapitulation is a necessary ingredient in a never-ending pattern of evolutionary experience, where recapitulation is essentially a process of amortization (as is karma). In order to produce the creative potency of a fully self-realized human being (having mastery of the three lower planes of consciousness), a tremendous investment of time, energy, and experience is required. And only after aeons of patient developmental experience are the fruits of the investment realized as a few souls begins to emerge with significant contributions to the quality (character) of the greater life. And only after aeons more do those souls emerge in significant numbers.

At the start of this long process (evolution) (following an eternity of involution), a vanguard of consciousness (awareness) must be established on the physical plane. A great deal of effort (force) is required at that stage of experience in order to awaken and sustain a conscious awareness of the physical world, and ultimately (at that stage) to develop the physical abilities leading (during later stages) to the mastery of the physical plane experience (to include mastery of the physical body (instrument) and mastery of the physical plane itself). The individual (humanity) must learn to consciously control each aspect of the physical constitution, but because of the relatively inflexible nature (inertia) of the physical plane, many incarnations are spent evolving the fundamental physical abilities and corresponding awareness (range).

Recapitulation is required in order to secure the gains of each incarnation. As progress is made there is more experience to be recapitulated (integrated), but as

experience is repeatedly assimilated (through successive recapitulations) the process becomes easier (requiring less relative time or effort) and more emphasis is placed on the more recent experience. As some degree of awareness is achieved on the physical plane, the next level of awareness (the emotional plane) is introduced into the formula (human consciousness) and the process of assimilating the new plane into the total achieved to that point is addressed in addition to the continued development on the lesser plane. As the extent of physical consciousness increases (as ability improves), emotional awareness is introduced earlier in successive incarnations. This lengthy process is not quite as extensive as in the preceding stage, for the astral (emotional) level is more flexible and therefore change (progress) (evolution) can be affected faster. However, the astral plane is much more complicated (dynamic) (less stable) than the physical, and it is relatively more difficult to control.

As was the case for evolution in physical plane terms, the individual (humanity) must learn to evolve an awareness on the astral plane, first through the development of an emotional capacity and ultimately through the refinement (elevation) of that capacity and the conscious control (awareness) (mastery) of the plane itself (which comes long after a capacity is developed for even higher consciousness) (as mastery implies far greater ability (potency) than merely being able to manipulate matter on a particular plane). Similarly, a vanguard of mental awareness is gradually achieved and developed.

Respective awareness begins on lesser (coarser) sub-planes and is gradually elevated as control (consciousness) is improved. As the evolutionary momentum increases, recapitulation is accelerated and more time (attention) (effort) is placed on higher levels of developmental consciousness. In each incarnation, the individual must re-conquer each element of the personality constitution that has been previously achieved, before the summit (vanguard) is reached and (true) progress becomes possible (leading to maturity (quality) (wisdom)).

Memory of Past Lives

One of the incidental questions concerned with understanding the principle of reincarnation is, "Why don't we remember (in a state of waking-consciousness) our past lives?" The answer to this question requires an understanding of what it is that reincarnates and what it is that does not.

Essentially, it is the higher self (soul) that (as an entity) is (relatively) eternal. The higher self is the upper triad of atma, buddhi, and manas (the three aspects of the soul) (the jivatma). The upper triad is permanently linked (attached) to a triad of permanent atoms via a "thread of buddhic matter." This thread, called the sutratma (or thread-self), connects the three permanent atoms in a manner analogous to beads threaded on a string. The permanent atoms of the soul are the matrices (energy patterns) from which the mind, the emotional, and the physical bodies (respectively) are created or recreated. The permanent atoms are essentially the storehouse (preserver) of the vibratory quality (not specific experience) abstracted from all of the experience through which they have passed during their numerous cycles of incarnation. Within the individual's permanent atoms (and genetic factors (factors inherent in the physical, emotional, and mental atoms and molecules of the parents)) is contained not only the record of consciousness of the individual but the history of the human (racial) form as well.

The lower self (personality) is not eternal (as an entity); it does not reincarnate. The lower self is also known as the lower triad (the physical emotional, and lower (concrete) mental bodies). It must be formed anew for each incarnation from the substance of each respective plane in response to the vibratory matrix preserved by the permanent atoms of the incarnating soul. The higher self utilizes a distinctly different personality vehicle (lower self) and corresponding physical brain for each incarnation. The human brain (at the current stage of evolution) is the instrument of the mind employed for waking-consciousness memory. "Brain-memory" can only maintain a record of those events with which it has had experience. Hence, there is no memory in the waking-consciousness of past lives because the brain of the current form is not the same

brain that served as the instrument for memory in any previous life, having been created anew with the current incarnation.

For the most part possessing information about past lives is not necessary. The abstracted quality (lessons learned and experience assimilated in consciousness) is accessible to the student who seeks to know himself. The details of the specific experience from each incarnation that contributed to the quality are generally of little significance, for it is merely the quality that is of real import in the evolution of consciousness. There are many individuals, though, who are curious about specifics, and englamoured by the self-importance associated with their imaginings of specific personality lives. Much energy can be wasted along such distracting lines.

There are several disadvantages to having a complete memory in the waking-consciousness of past lives. Among them would be the burden associated with having access to the input from hundreds of incarnations. Attempting to sort and recall information from such an immense data bank (given the current evolution of our instrument, the brain) would be clumsy, if not impossible. Further, there is much distracting physical and emotional content (desires, pain, suffering, excitations, passions, etc.) inherent in the specifics of experience. Dealing with the physical and emotional distractions of the current incarnation can be challenging enough.

† Commentary No. 642

Knowledge of Past Lives

While utilization of the normal waking-consciousness instrument of brain-memory is insufficient to provide knowledge of past lives, there are, nonetheless, two manners by which such knowledge can be acquired. The first and preferred manner is via the alignment of the personality and soul. The second is via the reading (interpretation) of the images imprinted in the akasha.

The soul, being (relatively) eternal, can recover information about its past lives (incarnations as personality) (but lacking interest, rarely does so, except unconsciously and incidentally). The soul is linked to the quality and specifics of its previous (incarnated) experience which is contained within the all-

encompassing memory or consciousness of the logos. The personality, being transient, has access only to those memories (vibrations in the logic consciousness) generated by the current incarnation. When the personality becomes aligned with the soul, a bridge is thereby built which allows these vibrations (memories) to be brought down and impressed upon the vehicles of the personality. The information obtained via soul alignment (where unclouded by personality deception and attachment) can most closely approximate truth.

The second method of obtaining past life information, via interpretation of akashic impression, is more complex and subject to a greater potential for self-deception. The akasha can be defined as, "the subtle, spiritual essence which pervades all space." It may be viewed as the "cause of existence" in the sense that all that exists is derived from it through the primordial processes of separation and differentiation. There are seven planes of akasha. Among its properties on the lower planes is a reflective quality that records a "cosmic picture-gallery" of all events and experience on the astral and physical planes. Various names have been applied to this lower plane akashic property, such as astral light, reflecting ether, memory of nature, and akashic record. On a higher plane, corresponding to the highest region of the concrete mental plane, thought-images are also recorded in akashic substance.

Only a trained, mentally or intuitively polarized occultist can see the thought-images stored in the higher (mental) region of the akasha. Those who are emotionally polarized and claim to see past life experiences of their own or others are reading in the lower region, the akashic record (astral light) (reflecting ether). Lacking the mind control to work on the higher level, they have access only to the lower levels. The life experience as well as the desire life of every human being throughout history and the experience of the entire animal kingdom are all contained within the akashic record. Only a trained occultist can readily discriminate between the pictures of actual experience and those astral pictures created as a result of intense desires or imaginings. Only a trained occultist can identify those records which are (1) planetary, (2) hierarchical, (3) imaginative, (4) historical, or (5) astrological in origin. Intelligently reading the akashic record is not a trivial matter given the inherent deception, complex matrices, and amount of information contained therein. Certainly the testimony (regarding past lives) given by emotionally polarized clairvoyants or the hypnotically entranced (artificially induced astral vision)

should be considered cautiously since there is only a small probability that the experiences seen and described may be undistorted and related to the individual about whom information is sought.

There are few situations in which knowledge of past lives is necessary or appropriate. The spiritual student should look to the higher self in these matters, trusting that appropriate knowledge will come.

† Commentary No. 728

Heaven and Hell 1

Most religions, both ancient and modern, contain teachings anent the post-mortem state of the human "soul." These teachings generally describe two possible conditions or localities wherein the soul, after death, may exist. The first locality (state or set of states) being accessible only to those who have lead virtuous, moral, or otherwise "righteous" lives, is called heaven. The second locality (state or set of states), being the unfortunate default position for all who were basically "evil," "sinful," or in some cases simply unaccepting of a particular religious doctrine, is called hell. Various religions have their own terms to represent what the Western terms "heaven" and "hell" used here imply.

Typically, the heaven experience is portrayed by religion as being a blissful fulfillment of the individual's desires or thought life. Descriptions of "roads paved in gold" and "pearly gates" indicate the extreme emphasis on materiality (maya) that some religious groups project into their vision of heaven. Hell, on the other hand, is portrayed as a place or state of torment, suffering, and pain. For orthodox Christianity (and the later Islamic religion), one's assignment to heaven or hell is based on but one lifetime, and the remainder of eternity is then spent either reaping rewards in heaven or enduring punishment in hell. There is one major difference between the heaven and hell of orthodox Christianity and those of Brahmanism, Buddhism, and most relatively unaltered ancient religions and philosophical systems. The heaven and hell of orthodox Christianity are eternal; those of the others are recognized as being transient states experienced between life cycle transitions (reincarnations). As the causes

that result in either the bliss of heaven or torment of hell are exhausted, the individual moves on to new experience.

Heaven and hell, from the theosophical (metaphysical) (ancient wisdom) perspective may be considered in several ways. First, the period spent in the lower sub-planes of kamaloka (on the astral plane) is a period of purgation, wherein all matter within the emotional body that is coarse must be shed before the individual may move onward. Most of humanity has, at this time, evolved beyond the extreme coarseness that requires an extensive purgatory experience. There are those few, however, who have yet to become sufficiently free of coarse lower astral matter (analogous to "evil"). The period spent on the lower sub-planes of kamaloka is, for them, a seeming hell. No longer possessing a physical body to dull the impact of lower emotions, they suffer emotionally with more intensity than we can understand from the physical plane perspective.

The individual may perceive his suffering to be eternal, but it is merely transient (though intense). When the individual passes from the lower sub-planes of kamaloka to the higher, he has entered into a state of consciousness sometimes called first heaven. When he further passes into the lower devachic states on concrete mental levels (second heaven), he experiences more truly bliss and light. If he is sufficiently evolved to experience the devachic states on the abstract mental sub-planes, he may exist or bathe in the presence of his soul (the Christ within), and thus realize his oneness with God.

This theosophical perspective then, does include states analogous to heaven and hell, but they are viewed as merely states through which the individual passes according to the degree of evolution attained. They are purposeful states that assist the individual in further evolving, and are governed (as is all else) by the law of karma. They are not mere states of retributive reward or punishment.

Heaven and Hell 2

There is a similarity between the transition states of kamaloka and devachan (a theosophical perspective) on the one hand, and the concepts of heaven and hell taught by most world religions (except orthodox Christianity and Islam).

There are universal truths or laws which theosophy seeks to embrace. These same truths form the basis of the teaching of all genuine world teachers (initiates), upon which religions later emerge. The problem with religion is that there is a tendency for truths to become diluted (misrepresented) as they are presented by the uninitiated in terms that the masses can understand.

The symbolic nature of a teaching is often misconstrued (or taken literally), and, over time, basic truths may degenerate greatly. These degenerations become crystallized into dogma that may retain only a "hint" of original truth. There is a further tendency for ideas that are not necessarily consistent with truth to be added on to some original truth, thus converting it into what is basically a superstition (from the Latin "superstitio," meaning to add upon). This is the case for the orthodox Christian teachings regarding heaven and hell in specific, and life and death, in general.

It is a positive sign that many thinking people within mainstream (but not fundamentalist) Christianity reject the orthodox dogma of heaven and hell. It seems impossible to sensibly reconcile the concept that "God is love" with the atrocities and torture of the eternal hell that He supposedly maintains for those who displease or "sin against" Him. Further, how could a sincere individual who endeavors to lead a Christ-like life qualified by love and brotherhood be truly content languishing (selfishly) in heavenly bliss while some of his brothers (errant though they may be) suffer through eternity? A static heaven for the selfishly unaware is a concept that can be seen as equally repulsive as the tortures of hell. While it is a positive sign that these doctrines are being questioned or rejected, an even greater step forward will come as more thinking people consider the basic cyclicity of life (reincarnation) and begin to understand the law of karma and qualifying evolutionary purpose.

From another theosophical perspective, life in physical incarnation on earth can be considered as hell. As man descends (falls) into the material world, he becomes further and further removed from his spiritual source on the higher planes. Union with the soul (the Christ-within) (the monad) is a state of pure bliss. This state of union may be considered as heaven (nirvana). The repeated sojourns of the individual through the (spiritual) darkness of the material world are the just rewards of all who are not as yet sufficiently pure, of all who have not as yet learned all of the lessons that earthly experience (suffering) encourages, and of all for whom there remains the pull of earthly desire. For ages, the individual struggles through lifetimes of darkness and suffering (hell).

Then, as he gradually becomes more self-conscious and begins to consciously tread the spiritual path, he becomes aware that he is able, by his own thinking and responses, to determine his own situation. He may make it a continual hell by persisting in identification with the material world and refusing (or failing) to learn the lessons of life, or he may consciously endeavor to realize the heaven that lies within. He may consciously align his lower self with his soul and thereby radiate that heavenly light into the darkness around him. This alignment (at-one-ment) is essentially participation in heaven, while yet on earth. It is the symbolic bringing forth of the Kingdom of God on earth.

† Commentary No. 1179

Transmigration

Transmigration is defined as the passing at or through death from one body to another and is loosely equivalent to reincarnation. But the sense of transmigration can convey a false implication that one can pass from a higher form to a lower form, and this is quite contrary to natural law and is simply not possible.

What really happens at death is that the consciousness withdraws from the body, undergoes a period of assimilation of experience, undergoes a period of rest (more subjective assimilation), prepares for rebirth, and then reincarnates (transmigrates) into a new body (at conception). The law (karma) insists that this be a progressive or evolutionary process. Consequently, one is drawn

naturally (under law) to ever higher lifeforms. As one's consciousness is refined through experience and expression, one learns how to create more refined vehicles for subsequent experience and expression. During the afterlife, in preparation for rebirth, one actually creates the next personality, i.e., physical, etheric, and astral bodies, and the concrete mind, based upon one's experience and developed abilities. One is guided and limited in this process by karma, so that one may not always reincarnate with an inherently healthy vehicle, but it is generally and necessarily the best that one can do under the (karmic) circumstances.

One does not pass from one body to another except through death and preparation for rebirth, except in very exceptional, very rare circumstances. The historical Christ appropriated the body of Jesus (in voluntary service), but this is by no means commonplace. There are sometimes incidences of possession, of one entity (lifeform) by another, due to psychic vulnerability (ignorance, carelessness), but even this is quite rare and not by any means permanent.

There are, very rarely, incidences of transmigration from one kingdom or lifewave to another, but never from a higher kingdom or lifewave to a lower. A human being, for example, could never reincarnate in the animal kingdom. That would be counter-evolutionary. But a human being could, in principle, become so attached to the material (ego) aspect, that the personality matrix must be destroyed and the person must begin the human experience over again. In which case the "person" may be held over until the following lifewave has reached the human stage. But even so, the "human being" is not becoming animal, the human being (straggler) is simply remaining human but is transferred to a following lifewave. Such a person is not joining the animal kingdom, but is joining the lifewave that "was" in the animal kingdom but is now becoming human. But this is extremely rare.

The purpose of life is evolution through consciousness. Thus reincarnation (transmigration) proceeds accordingly, under law, progressively, to facilitate that evolution. The main arena for transmigration (as distinguished from the normal course of reincarnation) is the fulfillment of the qualifications for life at the human level and subsequent transference (transmigration) into the next (higher) kingdom and corresponding lifewave. Thus human beings become super-human, having transcended the limitations of this (human) existence.

But even so, this is relatively rare, as few are able to qualify, and few are able to make that transition. Some of those few who qualify actually remain with humanity but work on subtle levels to guide and encourage the race, no longer being required to incarnate, but not needing to pass on to the leading (super-human) lifewave. The bridges between kingdoms and lifewaves are not generally open, at least not at all times. But there is nonetheless a continuum.



Section 7.121



Birth

- Birth typically refers to the birth of a human being into incarnation. This follows a period of preparation in which a personality is developed archetypically, to be unfolded and developed in the course of the incarnation.

Birth

Numerous cause and effect relationships exist with respect to the birth of a human being (the emergence into incarnation of the personality manifestation of a human soul). The karmic implications of birth (conception) can be both wide ranging and considerable. In general, sexual intercourse is an open invitation for a soul (or souls) to incarnate, the principal function of sexual intercourse being to provide opportunities for incarnation.

A more advanced soul is necessarily quite selective in seeking incarnation, both in timing and parentage (the quality of environment and consciousness), and consequently the preparation for such an incarnation takes a (relatively) considerable length of time, and the subsequent birth is the result of considerable momentum. For less advanced souls, less preparation is needed and more opportunities exist, but the circumstances (timing) (parentage) (environment) are still necessarily a function of the karma (quality) of the soul. Advanced souls tend to be constrained mainly by the quality of consciousness (parentage) and quality of environment (circumstances). Less advanced souls tend to be constrained mainly by (specific) karma.

The responsibility for conception must necessarily be shared by both partners and the incoming soul(s). Every act of sexual intercourse carries with it the responsibility for the consequences of that act. Though circumstances may qualify that responsibility, there can be no evasion of responsibility (for such is the law of karma). There are no accidents: there are only consequences of activity on every level of consciousness. In any event (conception), all participants are responsible both for that event and for any subsequent (related) consequences. The partners are responsible for providing the opportunity (invitation) for incarnation, while the incoming soul is responsible for the actual conception (which cannot occur without an inbound soul present).

Marriage is intended to provide a framework for assisting others to incarnate and adjust to the environment and circumstances of their birth and subsequent growth (experience). A healthy marriage aura (quality of consciousness) tends to attract relatively well-qualified souls. Conversely, a coarse marriage

environment will tend to attract relatively coarse souls. The environment prior to conception is important in the sense that it relates to the preparation of the soul for incarnation. The marriage aura between conception and birth is particularly important, because the incoming personality is particularly responsive (vulnerable) to that environment. The environment subsequent to the actual birth (physical emergence) is obviously important to the development of the child, physically, emotionally, and mentally. Both parents are necessarily responsible for providing a suitable environment for the growth of their child, until such time as the new personality can effectively assume that responsibility.

The character (temperament) of the new personality depends largely on the experience and development previously achieved, but the new personality is limited by the quality of the atoms provided by the parents at conception and subsequent development within the marriage aura (both before and after the actual birth). As the soul progresses (recapitulates) its personality, it can actually regenerate those atoms so that the new personality has the potential for progressing beyond the inherited quality to more refined (or more coarse) states. The soul has little effect on its personality until much later (if at all). In the meantime, the personality is almost entirely dependent on the matrix from which it was created and the environment into which it has emerged.

† Commentary No. 404

Abortion

Conception occurs as a result of the combination of the opportunity provided by the partners to sexual intercourse and the presence of a soul preparing to incarnate. Incoming souls are either obligated to incarnate due to karmic pressures, or are obliged to incarnate by virtue of their own intention (attraction). The vast majority are obligated to incarnate periodically, by karma, for needed experience. But in both cases, the responsibility for conception must be shared (consciously or otherwise) by the participants.

Abortion is the expulsion of a human fetus, naturally or otherwise, the premature termination of the process of incarnation for some inbound soul(s).

Natural (spontaneous) (non-deliberate) abortion occurs as a consequence of the karma of the incoming soul and as a consequence of the karma (temperament) (consciousness) of the parent(s). In some cases the soul is just not ready to incarnate (e.g., its personality may be too weak or simply incomplete). In other cases the mother (or parents) may be ill-prepared for one reason or another. But in any such event (natural abortion) the responsibility is shared by the incoming soul and the parents (all is a matter of consciousness and the forces (consequences) of consciousness).

Unnatural abortion (deliberate abortion or abortion as a result of carelessness) is a karmic event of considerable magnitude, both for the inbound soul and for those directly involved in the abortion process. Motives obviously qualify every action, as does the overall consciousness (and circumstances), but abortion is nonetheless a traumatic experience for the inbound soul (whose momentum to incarnate is terminated) and a karmic event with (qualified) consequences for all concerned. It is not so much a question of right or wrong as it is a question of responsibility, of maturity, of facing the consequences in form and consciousness of every action.

The rights of an individual are reasonably well-defined in a social context, to the extent that one's actions do not impose upon another (the problem being how to define the balance). The rights of a man or woman are one thing, and the rights of a pregnant woman (parents) are another, for sexual intercourse carries responsibility, and subsequent conception carries further responsibility. Conception means that the partners have extended an invitation (consciously and deliberately or otherwise) for some soul(s) to incarnate and that some soul(s) has accepted that invitation. From that point on, the rights of the inbound soul (via its personality and fetus) balance the rights of the mother (parents). In a metaphysical context, the soul (and its personality (matrix)) is alive before, during, and after incarnation. For as long as a soul is committed to incarnation (from the decision to incarnate in specific circumstances, through conception, birth, life (manifestation as a physical personality), death, etc.), there is a life force associated with every aspect. Only when the soul withdraws is the "life" of a form (fetus) (child) (person) no longer present. Thus the presence of a fetus (almost always) means the presence of an obligated life-force (soul). Any abortion constitutes (potentially grave) interference with a life-form, with consequences for all concerned.

A person should live according to his or her beliefs, to whatever extent is practicable, but be willing to face the implications and consequences of every action or condition in consciousness. Citing karma is never an acceptable excuse; responsibility cannot be evaded; the failure to realize and accept the implications and consequences of any act necessarily results in complications and additional karma (constrained experience).

† Commentary No. 994

Heredity

Heredity is “the sum of the qualities and potentialities genetically derived from one’s [physical plane] ancestors” and “the transmission of qualities from ancestor to descendant through a mechanism lying primarily in the genes.” Heredity is thus a major conditioning factor that (karmically) affects the personality life and its ability to express itself while in incarnation.

In modern science, however, there is considerable and largely unrealized confusion in (lack of) understanding the cause and effect relationships concerning the role of genes. Scientists and the general public tend to think of genes as causes, rather than as effects. In learning that, statistically, a particular gene is associated with particular “effects” leads the unwary observer to conclude that one (the gene) causes the other (manifested characteristics). Whereas, in fact, genes are simply (primary) effects of karmic forces and do not, in general, cause the associated secondary effects (manifested characteristics).

When the soul or higher self approaches incarnation, all of the karmically warranted genetic effects are taken into consideration (not rationally or objectively, but subjectively). Host parents and (cultural and genetic) conditioning factors are selected based on qualifications and needs (and karmic relationships). Thus the incarnated individual “inherits” the genetic factors (real and potential) that are karmically warranted. Genes are thus effects or consequences. Moreover, many genes are not deterministic, but, rather, they are merely potential, being opportunities for manifestation (evocation) rather than necessarily manifested. Thus the individual in incarnation, based on his or her activities on physical, etheric, astral (emotional), and mental (intellectual) levels

(i.e., attitudes and behavior), evokes genetic manifestations or not, depending on the circumstances. Thus genes are still effects, not causes. The real “cause” of genetic manifestation (evocation of genetic “effects”) is the karmic condition of consciousness.

In practice two people with essentially the same genetic makeup may easily manifest different “consequences” of that genetic composition depending on their respective circumstances in consciousness. For example, one person may succumb to a genetically “induced” disease, while another person with the same genetic makeup but different “consciousness” may not. The deciding factor is always karma, and karma is not so simple and straightforward that the “rules” are easily discerned. Thus while a “good” attitude may prevail, one may also succumb to genetically induced effects, because of some overriding karmic factor. While attitude is important, the needs of karma always prevail. Thus one may not be able to consciously determine the karmic effects, but one can, definitely (in principle), consciously determine how one responds to those effects (opportunities) [assuming one is conscious].

Genetic selection in the first place is made based upon anticipated “life” parameters. Some of those parameters are relatively fixed; others are flexible and can be changed (evoked or not) according to the dynamic needs and circumstances. Over the course of a lifetime, a person (hopefully) experiences, grows, and changes in consciousness. That growth is not easily predicted, at least not in its details. Thus each person needs a relatively broad range of opportunities, genetic (hereditarily) and environmental. Genes (genetic factors) are mostly convenient potentialities. The soul in incarnation can selectively activate genetic factors, evoking some, not evoking others, according to the circumstances in consciousness.

Precursory Effort

The efforts of the soul and personality during the pralaya between incarnations goes a long way toward determining the characteristics to be manifested during the subsequent incarnation. The period of withdrawal following the end of an incarnation is largely a matter of assimilation of experience and reinforcement of the positive attributes (which facilitate evolution in consciousness) cultivated or developed during the lifetime (and discouragement of any negative or counter-evolutionary attributes). At the end of that process of withdrawal, there is no personality and the soul simply “rests” for a while on its own level.

After suitable rest, the soul begins its preparation for rebirth by qualifying (creating) its intended personality. The work of the soul is qualitative and subjective. But as the soul advances in this process, the personality aspect emerges and plays an unconscious but more direct role in preparation by virtue of its conditioning from previous experience. Thus a personality (matrix) with a great deal of emphasis on physical attributes will result in much preparation along the lines of the physical body (e.g., physical beauty, physical strength, artful or skillful (e.g., musical) talents, etc.). Similarly, a personality matrix with more emphasis on emotional lines will result in much preparation (qualification) of the emotional nature (e.g., perceptive abilities, sensitivities). And likewise, a personality matrix that evokes a mentally polarized personality will result in much preparation (qualification) of the mental nature.

In short, what emerges into incarnation is the prepared and qualified personality, having been subjected to karmic constraints (both earned limitations and earned opportunities) and the “emphasis” of the momentum of previous personality experience. Even though it is a different personality that emerges than the one that was left behind (dissolved) at the end of the previous incarnation (e.g., it may be a different sex, a different race, with different attributes and characteristics), the “new” personality carries with it the karma of previous experience and a large part of the accumulated “development” achieved in earlier lives. Thus it will have certain tendencies in common with previous lives but it will be not entirely constrained thereby. A lot depends on

the ability of the soul to craft and tailor the personality matrix to support its intended experience and expression.

An unevolved soul will not be able to create or cultivate an “advanced” body and its associated physical, emotional, and concrete mental attributes and characteristics. Such a soul simply will not have the experience or wherewithal to produce something beyond its means. Susceptibility to disease and deformity is entirely karmic, but in part it is a matter of the relative ability of the soul to produce a healthy body. Another problem is that of emphasis, where a personality may be cultivated or developed in one aspect in particular without any real balance (e.g., a “beautiful” body without any substantive brain capacity (or vice versa)). As the soul advances and as the corresponding personality matrix is fulfilled, the resulting personality is more balanced and extremes of abilities are tempered by that balance (i.e., overall health is more valuable to experience and expression than extremes in appearance or strength).

The precursory efforts of the soul prior to the rebirth (incarnation) of the personality have effects on subsequent experience. But the inherent tendencies of the personality are relatively more valuable, e.g., responsiveness can to some extent overcome various inherited traits and conditioning.

† Commentary No. 1096

Personality Investment

During incarnation and even in the interval between lives, a “person” tends to invest time and energy and effort in developing various aspects of the personality as an instrument for experience and expression in the lower worlds. Although many “people” simply wander half-consciously through life (and through the after-life), others are more focused and more deliberate in their undertakings. Even so, many focused “people” invest a great deal of time and energy on aspects of personality having relatively little long-term value.

There are many evolutionary forces that condition or encourage various aspects of the human experience. Some of these forces encourage physical development and experience. Others encourage emotional or intellectual development and

experience. It is largely a matter of a person's consciousness (character, temperament, and values) determining the focus and priorities. Thus one can find "encouragement" in activities at any level, even if that tends to impede overall development (balance) (progress). Eventually (gradually), however, karma (consequences resulting from action (or inaction)) forces a person onward and upward, and the attachments of a particular focus or phase are overcome.

Two of the great distractions at the physical level are strength and beauty. Some people spend a great deal of time and effort developing physical strength well beyond their practical needs for experience and expression in the physical world. Some people likewise invest substantially in refining the appearance of the physical form in the attempt to embrace some notion of beauty. A particularly beautiful physical body, for example (based upon some cultural standards of "beauty"), may indicate that that person has neglected development in other areas of the human nature (or the person may have been neglectful for a while and then gone on to broader developments). Some invest in the development of very particular talents (e.g., athletic, musical) (which may even have value). On emotional levels, some people invest very heavily in refining the ability to sense on emotional levels (and to a large extent thereby remain absorbed or entangled on those levels). Others invest substantially in intellectual development, even along rather specialized lines.

But in any case wherever energy is invested, that energy is not invested elsewhere. A great deal of time and energy can therefore be squandered in these various pursuits. A measure of time and energy of course should properly be invested in each aspect of the human development. The physical form needs to be healthy and reasonably strong in order to sustain life (experience and expression) in the lower worlds. For efficiency and effectiveness the body needs to be within some reasonable range of health and appearance. Thus most spiritually-minded people (karma permitting) are (deliberately) healthy and have a generally pleasant appearance, but are not overly developed physically and are not absorbed (overly-involved) in their own appearance. Likewise for emotional and mental development. The objective in this context is to have a healthy and responsive instrument for experience and expression on physical, emotional, and mental levels. Thus balance is relatively important, and the spiritual student cannot afford to over-invest in any area (nor can the student afford to neglect any area).

Yet as the student evolves in consciousness, the development at lower levels naturally reaches the healthy-effective state and requires only minimal attention to sustain that vitality. Which means the student can afford to place more attention on higher development (expression) (service).



Section 7.122



Death

- Death typically refers to the ending of an incarnation of experience and expression, leading to the afterlife experience of assimilation and preparation for rebirth.

Death and the Afterlife 1

Learning about the purpose of life brings into consideration the subject of death and what happens after one dies. Within Western civilization, the inevitable approach of death generally elicits fear and misunderstanding, with many vexing questions: When a person dies, is he annihilated, or does he survive? If he survives, what is life after death like? Is there a heaven? Is there a hell? Is there eternal life?

For those with awareness of theosophical teachings, greater insights into the transition process may be more easily achieved and misunderstanding and trepidation alleviated. At death only the physical body is released, and man persists, remaining clothed in his several less dense bodies or vehicles of consciousness. In these he moves on to the next higher plane of consciousness, the astral (or emotional) plane. Indeed he does survive and continues in the process of transition, advancing on after periods of refinement and assimilation at each stage through the astral and then mental planes of consciousness, until he has eliminated his lower (astral and mental) vehicles and is clothed only in his causal body, the vehicle of his soul.

During this period, the wisdom, virtues, talents, and quality developed from the experiences on the lower planes (dimensions) of consciousness are extracted, while eventually preparation is made for future incarnation (rebirth) in the physical world. Each stage is a significant part of the recurring cycle of life, filled with potential for continued growth and evolution.

Although the dense physical plane seems to the average man in physical incarnation as the most real, the other more subtle planes of consciousness do exist and provide valid experiences and opportunities for the inhabitants of those planes as well. As an individual moves on toward the higher planes of consciousness and the realm of the soul, he advances closer to reality.

From this perspective, there is no death of the human consciousness. The releasing of (or death of) the physical body which is the outer coat or sheath just signals a commencing of the process of transition. But man is not his physical

body (nor his emotional body, nor his mental body); he is the soul, and the beginning of this transition process takes place according to the determination of the soul.

The soul is linked to the physical body via a silver cord (also referred to as the sutratma). The silver cord is divided into two threads; one called the consciousness thread is attached in the head region of the physical body, and the other called the life thread is secured in the heart region. During sleep, the consciousness thread and the higher bodies of consciousness leave the physical body, and an individual's focus of consciousness dwells in the astral plane of consciousness (generally), to be recalled to the physical body as one awakens back into the physical plane. All the while the life thread which provides for the continuity of life within the physical body remains secured in the heart.

At physical death, however, the life thread joins with the consciousness thread as both are recalled by the soul, through the breaking of the silver cord link with the physical form. As a result, the physical body no longer can maintain its cohesion and vitality. The higher bodies of consciousness are liberated from the dense physical vehicle and are drawn into the next world of the astral plane. The etheric double is also disengaged from the dense physical body; however it continues to hover over the dense body while it decomposes.

Also withdrawn by the soul to a higher plane is the permanent physical atom in which is found the archetype for the physical body containing the physical attributes developed. The permanent physical atom will be used again in forming the dense body for future physical incarnations.

Left behind at death then is the dense physical body which traditionally in Western culture has been buried. Cremation, however, used often in Eastern cultures, holds many advantages and is the preferred method for spiritual reasons. This avoids the blight of slowing decaying corpses in cemeteries which effects the etheric and psychic atmosphere of our planet. Instead, cremation quickly releases the physical elements to return to their source to be used again in future manifestations. It also disperses negative energies that may be attached to the corpse, and brings about proper release and restitution.

Memorial services which focus on the continuity of life and the uplifting release of the individual to the higher planes of consciousness provide a source of encouragement to loved ones, and are helpful in preventing an extended period of mourning which distracts and detains the transitioning individual. With an understanding of the recurring cycle of life and death and the realization that there is no actual death of human consciousness, attachments can be released which might impede the progress of one whose time it is to move on and who no longer has a physical body in which to function.

The experiences and quality of life after death are directly related to the quality of life lived in the physical world. The quality of matter (energy) that he has built into his astral and mental bodies during physical plane life draws him to the corresponding astral sub-plane. The more purified his emotions and desires, the higher is the matter that composes his astral body, and he will naturally be attracted to a higher astral sub-plane. The lower his desires and feelings, the lower the corresponding astral sub-plane.

Onto whatever astral sub-plane an individual is first drawn, there occurs a review of the just completed life experience on the physical plane to learn the lessons that it contains. If one had engaged in the process of retrospection (regular review of one's life) while still in the physical world, he may have already abstracted much of the meaning and learning contained within his experiences. Additionally, because he still had a physical vehicle in which to function, he could also have taken immediate steps to right any wrongs committed, thereby helping to balance his karma as well.

On the astral plane, the lowest three sub-planes are referred to as the region of purgatory because the energy and experiences there are rather coarse. A very coarse individual will dwell there until he has dissipated (overcome) some of his lower desires and emotions. As he does so the coarser matter will be released and eventually he will move on to the next higher astral sub-plane.

Addictions to such impediments as alcohol, drugs, tobacco, or inappropriate sexual activity will after death hold a person in bondage on the lower astral sub-planes until they are overcome. The individual will still retain these cravings, but will no longer have a physical vehicle in which to satisfy or deal with the longings. Therefore it is even more challenging to overcome such addictions

after leaving the physical plane and thus is beneficial to sublimate such desires while still in incarnation.

Is there a hell? Not really. But by his own gross consciousness, harmful projections, and negative quality of energy, an extremely coarse individual will create and attract his own hellish environment on the lower astral. With more enlightened consciousness, an individual can instead create his own version of heaven in the astral. The higher astral planes reflect the aspirational life and representations of mankind's concepts of paradise, utopia, or heaven. A heaven or hell experience is dependent upon the quality of an individual's consciousness and the expectations one has about the after life. The world of desire simply reflects and corresponds to what is in one's consciousness.

† Article No. 43

Death and the Afterlife 2

The region of the astral plane involved in the after-death transition process is referred to as kamaloka. The three lowest astral kamalokic sub-planes comprise the region of purgatory, characterized by coarse energies and experiences. The fourth astral kamalokic sub-plane is frequently called the borderland, and the highest three kamalokic sub-planes are designated the first heaven, embracing purer, more noble aspirations and beauty.

The law of attraction holds sway on the astral plane. Each person's experiences on the plane differ according to the person's quality of consciousness, desires, feelings, and thoughts. By one's desires and thoughts, an individual of average spiritual consciousness can create in the fluidic astral environment of colors and shapes anything he wants, and he can remain absorbed in his seemingly real creations and pleasures for quite some time.

If one's desire is for riches, power, or sensual pleasures, one can create them. Or if one desires instant spiritual awareness or a specific perspective of the kingdom of God, the illusion can be manifested. If a person is expecting to see a beloved religious figure when he passes into the astral plane, his desire can create that very experience as well as creating lifelike thought-forms of family or

friends. Eventually he will realize the illusion of it all and through detachment overcome his attraction and desire for such experiences. Only then will he move on to higher sub-planes and more meaningful activities.

Contributing to the general realization of the continuity of life after death are investigations of near-death experiences in which a person is clinically dead yet medically revived and brought back to life. A number of people from all walks of life have reported comparable experiences, with most encountering instead of pain or suffering a great peace and love (on the astral plane), after which they reportedly become aware that their work in the current life is not completed and they must (karmically) return to their body.

Frequently the experience brings increased spiritual awareness and a desire to help others as well as a definite release from the fear of death for the individual realizes that life does continue. Individuals involved in near-death experiences may interpret the occurrences in whatever religious or philosophical terms to which they ascribe, but overall similarities are notable.

For persons on the physical plane overwhelmed by misery and pain, the concept of escape through suicide may seem like a way out. But that is an illusion. One cannot escape one's problems in physical life or physical death for the law of karma holds each accountable. In death one only drops the physical body; the problems remain and often seem more intense and challenging to deal with when one lacks a physical body. The distraught suicide individual is usually held in limbo on the lower astral planes for the interval his normal physical plane life would have been had it not been inappropriately interrupted. The karmic consequences and arrogance of taking one's own life and thwarting the soul's purpose are great (unless there are significant mitigating circumstances such as no longer preserving forms which haven't any remaining coherent purpose to serve).

Death at the appropriate time is a beneficial release from crystallization and limitation of physical form and consciousness and results in restitution. It involves "the destruction of form in order that the indwelling life may shine forth in fullness." Physical death commences the transition process of advancing from one state of consciousness to a higher one.

A person may not be immediately aware that the process has begun. In cases of sudden death which occur through accident, violence, or sudden health failures such as heart attack or stroke, a person initially may not even realize he is physically dead because parts of the astral plane of consciousness superficially appear like the physical earth plane. Eventually the disincarnated person becomes aware of inconsistencies which he realizes could not be of the physical world. The newly deceased individual also will receive assistance in the transition process from those who serve on those levels.

For the average person, the immediate after-life experience is a continuance of the physical living interests, consciousness, and awareness. For the spiritual student, death is a continuance of the spiritual service and learning activities which he has been participating in during intervals of sleep.

However for the extremely coarse or cruelly selfish individual, intense desire for physical plane sensuality can temporarily bind him to the physical earth after death. These earth-bound individuals who no longer have a physical body seek by whatever means to experience physical life again and may even attempt to appropriate another person's physical vehicle in which to experience physical sensations and appease cravings and addictions. Only when the desires are somewhat overcome and dissipated can they free themselves and move on into the transition process on the astral plane.

Another category of people who may remain for a period bound to the earth after physical death are those who are strongly attached to physically living persons and cannot reconcile leaving them, or individuals who greatly desire to accomplish unfulfilled earthly duties even though they no longer have a physical body. These disincarnate persons may at times appear to those on earth as ghostly apparitions. Moreover, strong attachments by those living on earth to loved ones who have died may distract them or hold the loved ones temporarily earth-bound. Attempts to contact the deceased through séances or other means are counterproductive and possibly harmful to all parties involved. More appropriate is to send loved ones light, love, and encouraging thoughts which can reach them on the astral plane and be of benefit to them in transition.

The after-life stages, if the individual is properly motivated and developed, offer much opportunity for growth of consciousness and spiritual service. As always

the law of karma governs persons whether in or out of incarnation, and wisdom in choices results in a more timely transition through the subtle planes and increased current and future opportunity.

Detachment and refinement of desire ultimately allow the transitioning individual to free himself and pass through the astral plane. Those who are more spiritually aware will consciously and mentally assist in the process, and because their attachments are fewer (detachment being a focus of their physical plane life as well), the process is expedited. The astral body becomes so purified and refined that the astral particles composing it are gradually released. As the astral plane lessons are extracted and the pull of the mental plane increases, a second death occurs and the astral body is released.

There ensues a period of gestation in which the astral quality is withdrawn into the astral permanent atom for future use and the mental body is vivified. Upon awakening into the mental plane, the individual finds himself in what is known as devachan, the second heaven region. Using his mental body, he functions on the concrete sub-planes of the mental plane to the degree of his development, assimilating the mental experiences of his previous incarnation.

There is potentially much bliss in the second heaven experience, of an even more refined quality than that the first heaven of the astral plane. However, for average man who is more emotionally oriented than mentally developed, participation is limited. Unless he led a more substantial mental life previously, developing the concrete and the abstract mind, the ability cannot be developed during the interlude between lives.

The more mentally developed person may dwell on the mental plane in devachan for considerable periods, participating in the fruits of earlier planted mental seed-thoughts. There the individual also learns the technique of building his vehicles of consciousness for future incarnation. Spiritual students who are mentally polarized and aligned to a considerable extent with their soul frequently forego the devachic experience to instead reincarnate for purposes of service. Generally they have already assimilated much of their mental experience while in physical incarnation so there is little further need for reflection. They also sense that the bliss of devachan cannot compare to the greater joy and bliss of nirvana, achieved at a higher state of consciousness after

more evolutionary progress (not that any such bliss is part of the goal), nor with the joy of service even in the lower worlds.

When (as) learning and wisdom are assimilated from mental experiences, the concrete mental particles of the mental body are released and the third death occurs. The individual remains clad in his higher formless sheath, the causal body, which is the vehicle of the soul. This concludes the transition of the personality. The physical, emotional, and mental permanent atoms are recalled along with the sutratma into the causal vehicle. The causal body is the repository of all talents, virtues, and wisdom developed by the individual in his long course of incarnations.

The period between death and rebirth is not complete until the individual experiences to whatever degree possible the higher abstract (formless) mental sub-planes in which he contacts or touches his soul. For the unevolved person, this may be a brief, limited, unconscious or semi-conscious experience while for the more highly evolved individual who has developed more of his abstract and spiritual abilities, the experience will be of longer duration and more conscious. A more insightful overview of the just completed life, its purpose, and quality may be obtained in that state of consciousness, while a brief insight into the next incarnation is given by the soul as a means of understanding the future learning opportunities, and as a way of connecting all the previous incarnations so that common evolutionary threads may be more apparent. Certainly the karmic learning experiences of the future lie in the roots of the past.

Soon the urge to reincarnate occurs. The typical individual, sensing imperfection and the lack of development of his vehicles of consciousness which prevented him from participating more fully on the higher planes, desires to return to the physical plane for further experience, development, and refinement. The call of karma and evolution cannot be ignored.

The after-life period between death and rebirth is sometimes called bardo. The length of the bardo experience can vary considerably (from months to thousands of years) as there is no set timeframe valid for everyone. The bardo cycle may be relatively short for the unevolved person who has limited consciousness on the higher planes, and limited mental experiences to assimilate. On the other hand, it may also be brief for the more highly evolved and developed serious spiritual

student mentally polarized and aligned with his soul who undergoes much of the assimilation process while still in physical incarnation and chooses to return to incarnation sooner. Additionally the bardo interval may be short for the individual who died during childhood with less experience to assimilate. The longest bardo periods often correlate with a person who is emotionally and mentally quite developed but with much experience to reflect upon.

In physical life and in death, it is apparent that nothing stays the same and the only constancy is change (growth). There are cycles of manifestation and unmanifestation, periods of activity and seeming inactivity, day and night, but life never ends and however it may change and clothe itself, it continues evermore on an upward spiral of magnificent and expanding evolution.



Death

Death has been defined as the permanent cessation of all vital functions, the ending or completion of a cycle or particular activity. A more appropriate (metaphysical) definition is to equivalence death with transition, the passage or change from one state of consciousness or manifestation to another.

When a particular human being dies, that individual simply experiences transition, the passing from (focus) waking-consciousness in the physical world into the (lower) superphysical worlds. That transition suggests the ending of life in the physical world and the preparation for continued life (existence) (experience) on a higher plane of consciousness, or the preparation for a return for further experience (reincarnation) in human form in the physical world.

But there is not (and cannot be) any real death (destruction). The life (consciousness) continues to exist independently of the form. That life is indestructible, though it may be manifested in various ways and upon various levels. And even the form itself (matter) cannot be destroyed; for the form is merely transformed from one state to another. The physical body disintegrates as the constituent atoms are returned to their natural state of formlessness, only to be reformed in various ways in other times. The universal manifestation is forever changing, as one experience leads to another, as one form outlives its usefulness and is set free to begin anew, as the life evolves from one state of consciousness to the next. Life and death are as natural as experience and manifestation themselves, and should be viewed and accepted as natural.

The spiritual student should recognize the appropriateness and meaningfulness of life in the lower worlds, but should also recognize the natural inevitability of death (transition) for all living creatures, each in its own way and in its own time. The student should not be attached to life in the lower worlds, nor should the student fear or otherwise resist death when the time comes. Furthermore, the spiritual student should not be attached to the lives of others. There may be (should be) a sincere measure of compassion in recognition of pain or suffering, but at the same time, the student should recognize and understand the processes (action and consequence) that result in pain, suffering, and even

death. To express sorrow (grief) at the death of a loved one may be natural, but it indicates a measure of attachment and selfishness. Even the most detached of spiritual students may feel sadness in response to the death of a living creature, and yet, at the same time, a certain (inner) (quiet) joy should temper all sadness, the joy of release (freedom) into higher existence, as every death contains within a new birth.

For souls fully conscious in the (human) superphysical worlds (as so few souls are), the birth (reincarnation) of an individual into the physical world is viewed as death and with great compassion. For life in the lower worlds is a most difficult (but necessary) life of limitation and (apparent) separation from the realities of higher existence. Because of the appropriateness (karma) of life (experience) in the lower worlds, lives should not be terminated prematurely (nor should they be prolonged needlessly). Certainly, reasonable measures may be taken to support continued (useful) life and experience in the lower worlds, but when the soul attempts withdrawal, then the human efforts (or interference) should cease. The need for dynamic harmlessness should be readily apparent to all who tread (or seek to tread) the spiritual path, and a reverence for (all) life should overshadow and qualify every waking moment. Needless to say, the deliberate or careless taking of another's life is strictly forbidden, for such is in direct conflict with the intention of life (and death).

† Commentary No. 482

Suicide

Suicide is defined as the act or instance of taking one's own life, voluntarily and intentionally. In the esoteric philosophy, suicide is considered one of the major crimes, although there may be some (rare) circumstances where it is warranted. It is considered a crime because the ego (personality) does not have the right to kill or injure any of the personality vehicles (physical body, etheric double, astral body, mind), since those vehicles belong not to the ego (personality) but to the soul.

The soul does not countenance suicide (or any other impositional activity) (not that the soul has much awareness of personality activities). It is the soul's prerogative to terminate its incarnation (without such compelling karma),

although quite rarely does the soul exercise that prerogative (when it does, the body simply dies or falls into a coma (as the soul withdraws)) (this is not to say that any death or coma is necessarily the result of some such withdrawal; in fact, almost every instance is strictly a karmic matter (a karmic consequence)). It is not the prerogative of the ego (personality) to impede or imperil the soul's incarnation in any manner, yet the ego does in many cases have the power to do so. Thus, suicide is considered a misuse of egoic power and a tragedy in the sense that it is not warranted by karma (although the conditions faced and capabilities available to the ego in any situation (including consideration of suicide) are determined nonetheless by karma).

Death resulting from a suicide attempt is much like any other death, except that the victim is bound to the lower worlds (principally the astral plane) for the duration of what would have been that person's natural life. The suicide is not permitted any relief or further transition until warranted by the soul's intention. Consequently, whatever distress prompted the personality's decision likely continues unabated (or with even greater vigour since the physical body is no longer present to dull the sense impressions). Much like an alcoholic who dies without facing up to his problem, the suicide tends to linger on coarse (lower astral) levels, reliving whatever desires or distress he (she) sought to avoid in the first place. The suicide also tends to linger about those to whom he (she) was or felt close to during his (her) (aborted) incarnation, particularly where those people are responsive to his (her) coarse energy.

For a spiritual student to commit suicide without sanction is an unconscionable act that seriously undermines that person's relationship to and progress upon the path. For others it is less unconscionable but nonetheless grave and not without considerable impact. As ever, the consequences are more serious for those who (should) know better. The role of the spiritual student in the face of another person's suicide is simply to offer (gentle) light (love) energy, and the encouragement for understanding. There can be no intervention in the suicide's fate, but one can encourage the fallen one to face up to the circumstances (consequences). Needless to say, one should not approach a suicide on coarse levels nor permit any such person to affect one's own lower nature (only the physically and emotionally polarized are vulnerable).

By definition, suicide per se is voluntary and intentional. One who kills himself while under the influence of drugs or while vulnerable to (coarse) external forces is nonetheless responsible for his own fate, but it is not considered suicide in the same sense as one not so influenced. Sad though any (apparent) tragedy may be, in each case (proper suicide or otherwise) all of the pertinent factors are incorporated in the near-term and/or long-term karma, so that whatever lessons are needed are eventually learned, without avoidance.

† Commentary No. 857

Withdrawal of Consciousness 1

The withdrawal of consciousness from the human form can take place in a number of different ways, both, naturally or unnaturally, normally or abnormally, partially or completely, temporarily or permanently, and voluntarily or involuntarily. In a sense, virtually all withdrawals are natural and normal, even in the vast majority of cases of disease or incapacitation, which are merely karmic consequences naturally and normally occurring. However, the terms unnatural and abnormal also refer to cases wherein the ego or personality engenders the condition (partial or complete “unnatural” withdrawal) through carelessness or ignorance (stupidity).

The withdrawal of consciousness from the human form means simply that the soul has chosen to withdraw from the state or condition of waking-consciousness, in which case the dense physical form remains and some or all of the higher vehicles of consciousness are withdrawn from direct association with that lower form. This occurs naturally and normally in the case of sleep (temporary withdrawal for revitalization) and in the case of death (permanent withdrawal from incarnation). This occurs less naturally (unnaturally) and less normally (abnormally) in the case of hypnosis and suicide. Hypnosis is a temporary and externally imposed withdrawal (even if naively and consciously cooperated with by the ego or personality). Suicide is indeed a permanent withdrawal, but nonetheless unnatural and abnormal (and results in a lingering of the more subtle vehicles in darkness (and distress) until the time at which the person would have died naturally).

A significant factor in the withdrawal of consciousness is whether or not it is the soul's intention (or the soul's karmic obligation) to withdraw temporarily or permanently. A recoverable coma, for example, is a case of a temporary withdrawal, while an unrecoverable coma is a case of a permanent withdrawal. "Death" actually occurs when the silver cord is severed (by the soul) and the higher vehicles are withdrawn (orthodox medical science will benefit when this fact is recognized and such severance is efficiently detected (if not even the karmic factors and the soul's intention)). In the case of permanent withdrawal, the body begins to decay unless otherwise (artificially) sustained. Artificial sustainment may be by physical means, in the case of orthodox medical treatment, or by psychic means, in the case of possession by some other incarnated or non-incarnated entity, human or otherwise. In either case, artificial sustainment of the human form is abnormal and unnatural, albeit nonetheless a karmic consequence (which in turn breeds further karmic entanglement on the part of whoever imposes such sustainment).

Withdrawal of consciousness also occurs unnaturally (partially or otherwise) in the case of drug use (including consumption of any measure of alcoholic beverage). Withdrawal of consciousness occurs more naturally in the case of disease and the various autistic states. In Alzheimer's disease, for example, there is a gradual (initially partial, then progressive) and natural withdrawal of consciousness in response to some karmic obligation. Autism is more likely a case in which the soul is ill-prepared to function "normally" in human society and therefore evokes a partial and/or temporary withdrawal for its own purposes.

Withdrawal of consciousness may be a difficult matter for friends and family members, although it helps to realize that "lessons" are thereby intended for all who are involved or associated, not just those who are directly incapacitated by such withdrawal. All consequences are karmically conceived and brought about under law. The relatively wise learn from every experience.

Withdrawal of Consciousness 2

Human consciousness actually manifests through three centers of consciousness, the monad on its level, the soul on its level, and the personality on its level. For all practical purposes, the perfected human being exhibits a personality consciousness that is wholly uplifted to, merged with, and responsive to, the soul on its level.

In the case of consciousness partially withdrawn from the lower self (as in sleep, coma, or some debilitating disease in which a person is awake but not really (wholly) "there"), the personality consciousness continues to function on astral and/or mental levels, according to its ability, but without being able to effectively utilize the physical vehicle (e.g., without being able to utilize the brain or without being able to properly control the movements of the physical body). However, in some cases, the "damage" is to the astral (emotional) or lower mental body (concrete mind), and the effects observed in the physical body are simple a reflection of that higher impediment.

It generally takes some higher perception to determine whether or not the silver cord is actually severed or the consciousness is merely partially and/or temporarily withdrawn. Whenever the soul is fully (irrevocably) withdrawn, the silver cord is also severed. But once the silver cord has been severed, which means the soul has consciously decided to terminate the incarnation, the astral and mental faculties are also withdrawn, in turn, as they have served their respective purposes (i.e., following purgatorial experience). In principle, however, a sufficiently capable (and sufficiently misguided) "dead person" or some other capable (misguided) entity can continue to (abnormally) animate the discarded body and/or lower vehicles, even as they disintegrate. Such an entity must provide considerable energy in order to slow down the disintegration process and to animate or otherwise utilize the (mis)appropriated body, and this is not very practical or effective. It also seriously violates the law. This phenomenon is one of the reasons why cremation is preferred over burial, as cremation hastens the dissolution of the bodies and prevents their misuse (and facilitates the passage of the newly "dead" on to other, more suitable levels).

In some cases, e.g., autism, the consciousness is partially withdrawn and functions in an “otherworldly” manner simultaneously with some presence and activity on the physical plane. In other cases, a person whose consciousness is withdrawn continues to function “consciously” on astral and/or mental levels, even if there is no memory of such activity brought back to the waking-consciousness. On the other hand, the one who withdraws has no more awareness on astral or concrete mental levels upon withdrawal than he or she had while wholly embodied, but such withdrawal does afford some resolution of difficulties (in consciousness) without further impediment of the physical body.

Withdrawal of consciousness, like every other aspect of life and death, is fundamentally a matter and function of karma (self-generated causal forces). The friends and family of a partially or temporarily or even permanently withdrawn but artificially-maintained person, can only complicate their own karma by interfering in these natural or unnatural processes. On the other hand, “encouragement” through love and compassion (albeit not through “attachment”) can facilitate the affected person’s resolution of difficulties (but of course, only to the extent that that person’s karma allows) (similarly, making demands of the affected person through attachments, etc., only complicates matters for all concerned). In short, compassion and kindness, without attachment or expectation, is always appropriate for the doer.

† Commentary No. 1439

Dying Gracefully

Entering transition properly, or dying gracefully, has at least two components, namely a person’s desire or intention or need to die gracefully and the role of friends and family and other attendants in allowing that person to die gracefully.

Most people do not really understand the transition process but have beliefs about death and the after-life that may or may not be realistic but are satisfying or not as the case may be. But most people don’t really “know” about death or transition and rebirth and there is therefore generally and usually some apprehension, concern, fear, or foreboding. This tends to be more prevalent at

instinctive levels, i.e., the body's instinct for self-preservation and comparable instincts on emotional and mental (ego) levels. Most people do not want to suffer growing old or experiencing pain and discomfort as the body wears out. Many seek to artificially (and futilely) sustain the appearance of youthfulness. Many seek to live longer lives, also relatively futilely. These are generally related to vanity (appearances) and either attachments to "living" or the inability to appreciate the naturalness and inevitability of death (and the usefulness of what exists beyond). Thus some people seek to extend their lives artificially, which does not generally sustain the (actual) quality of life. Others are more sanguine and many people seek simply to end their lives gracefully, with dignity, when their time comes naturally.

Emotional and mental attachments tend to make transition relatively rather more difficult, both in terms of letting go, and in terms of lingering after death. If one is attached to people or things or experience in the lower world, then the personality as a whole (and the ego in particular) is (are) generally resistant to transition, even if there is understanding and acknowledgement of the need to die. Transition generally occurs when the lifetime, or the soul's intentions for the lifetime (in terms of experience and expression, fulfillment of karma, growth in consciousness) has (have) been achieved. Sometimes it is simply a matter of terminal disease or injury, evoked through karma. Sometimes it is a matter of growing old and the body wearing out, naturally. The body (and mind) wear out naturally as the impulse (momentum) for incarnation is gradually and eventually fulfilled. But a person can sometimes remain in this world, artificially, through attachments and artificial means. Which tends to evoke suffering because it is unnatural or contrary to the needs of the soul.

For some people letting go is not so easy. People tend to be entangled in the world and have attachments at various levels. And even where the body is wearing out the mind may still cling to worldly activity and engagements. These attachments, on physical, emotional, and mental levels, actually interfere with the natural process and make transition more difficult, not only in approaching transition, but also during the period immediately after death. In not letting go one is simply not responsive to higher needs. And even if one is "staying" for a while, not letting go of (worldly) attachments serves to preclude any real learning (it dulls the inner senses). In letting go one is thereby

relatively more responsive to higher needs and the learning experience (which continues after death).

Upon physical death there are considerable needs for assimilation and passing on to the next level. But attachments to the worldly life and the clinging to or by other people can interfere in this process and delay the actual transition. So it is also crucial that one's loved ones also let go, effectively.

† Commentary No. 1463

Cremation

Cremation is the process of reducing a dead body to its basic elements by the action of fire, preferably in a furnace at relatively high temperatures, and preferably during a period of time some three-to-five days after physical death. The interval of time from physical death to disposition of the body is actually important. Cremation of the body too soon after death tends to disrupt the transition process, making it relatively more difficult for the newly departed to focus on initial assimilation. And cremation later than five days after death tends to inhibit the passing on of the newly departed to the next stage of transition.

During the period of time immediately following physical death there is necessarily a period of several days of retrospective focus. During this period it is best to have no interference with the body or that retrospective process, i.e., no autopsy, no embalming, no cremation. Autopsies are invasive and disruptive and should be avoided if at all practicable. Embalming is simply neither necessary nor desirable for cremation. After the period of retrospective focus, cremation is the most effective way of reducing the influence of the body on the newly departed, allowing the person to move on. Cremation is the proper and traditional means of body treatment. Burial of uncremated remains is rather unsavory in the sense that an uncremated body takes a relatively long time to decay which encourages the departed spirit to linger and in the sense that cemeteries tend to attract all manner of etheric and astral creatures who feast upon the remains.

During life in the objective world most people identify to some extent with their body, their feelings, and their mind. At death, the "spirit" takes leave of the physical body and stands in the etheric double. As the body decays so is the spirit freed from the etheric double. Cremation simply allows that process to proceed without distraction. Once the body is cremated the spirit is no longer tied to the physical body or the etheric double, and progressively is freed from both the emotions and the mind. Moreover, an uncremated body allows the possibility of appropriation of the etheric double by some other entity. Cremation simply facilitates transition.

Cremation per se is the process of incinerating the body, which is not necessarily coincident to a memorial service or funeral or actual disposition of the remains. Cremation is consistent with the teachings of all the world's religions, although some people interpret this rather narrowly and exclusively. In the Christian faith, for example, the "body of resurrection" is not the same as the body that has died. The tendency toward Christian "burial" is mostly a reaction to pre-Christian traditions and sustained by Christian (low church) superstitions. Cremation offers no impediment to resurrection. Indeed, cremation facilitates both transition and rebirth (resurrection). Of course the most significant aspect of the dead body is that it is not the consciousness or spirit. It is simply the physical vehicle that has served its purpose and is no longer needed and which should then be disposed of properly, in such a way that environmental impact is minimized and in such a way that transition is facilitated.

Psychologically, it is generally a person's identification with and attachment to the body that favors burial rather than cremation. But those who realize the truth about the body and consciousness (and transition) clearly prefer cremation. And for those who remain cremation offers no less opportunity for sentiment and remembrance than burial.

Section 7.13



Transition

- The whole process of death and preparation for rebirth is properly considered as transition, between life and death, between death and life. The human being is a pilgrim, a reflection from higher realms who passes through (transits) (descends into and through) the lower, more objective, more material realms in order to accomplish the intended purpose. Thus each human is born into the lower worlds (of acute manifestation), develops through experience and expression in those lower worlds, and ultimately dies (from the standpoint of the lowest level) and passes through a period of assimilation and preparation for rebirth, and is then reborn into the lower worlds for additional experience and expression, until such time as the momentum is exhausted, i.e., until the pilgrim graduates and is no longer required to return to these levels. The seven planes are thus perceived as the field of activity through which the pilgrim passes. There is, necessarily and continuously, movement in consciousness, and therefore transition.

Transition 1

Immersed in the struggles of material existence, with no clear concept or understanding of the cycle of life and creation, the average (Western) man approaches the prospect of death (inevitable though he realizes it to be subconsciously) with fear and confusion. Understood from a theosophical perspective, however, there should be little cause for uncertainty or apprehension. Indeed death has been described as “the great adventure,” the release from the prison of matter leading to “adventures” in consciousness beyond those realizable to the waking consciousness of someone in physical incarnation.

What is commonly called death is really only the transition of the waking consciousness in the physical world into the lower levels of the super-physical worlds. Death is one of several transitions in consciousness that man undergoes (on the physical, emotional (astral), and mental planes) in the greater cycle of birth (into a physical body), experience, restitution, assimilation, elimination, preparation, and rebirth (into another physical body).

Only a small portion of each life cycle is spent on the physical plane, but it is this portion that most of Western humanity erroneously regard as (the greatest or only) reality. Even among those who have some (limited) appreciation of super-physical realms (planes), the experiences on these inner planes is often believed to be of a more dream-like, semi-conscious quality, and the inner planes themselves are believed to be more illusory in nature than the so-called “reality” of the physical plane. But the consciousness experienced in the higher realms (even after death) depends on the (overall) quality of consciousness achieved, and that (super-physical experience) can range from semi-conscious and dream-like to a relatively sharp objective awareness (complemented with subjective insight).

The astral plane is often called the “world of illusion,” (no less so than the physical plane (just in a different way)), but to one of proper training, the astral plane is actually one step nearer to reality than is the physical. Indeed, the ascension from the physical to the astral to the mental planes is one which

draws the man ever out of illusion and nearer to reality. The shedding of the physical body (death), frees the inner man to direct, physically unencumbered experience through the astral body. Similarly, with the falling away of the astral body (sometimes referred to as the second death), the man is further liberated to function through his (however undeveloped) manasic (mental) vehicle without the necessity to work through the physical brain or the potentially distorting astral vehicle (emotions).

With the exception of the relatively unevolved, man on the inner planes (after death) is potentially as (or almost as) conscious of himself as an individual as he was during physical incarnation (one must be considerably qualified before the same is true of one actually in incarnation). The (physically) disembodied state is, relatively speaking, a more "normal" state than the physical life, owing to the comparative reality and duration of the former. Man, on the inner planes, recognizes (to the extent of his consciousness) the governing principles of the Law of Rebirth, and is aware (possibly not immediately after death, but at later stages) that the passage through the inner planes, and the consequent elimination of his astral and mental vehicles is but part of the interlude between incarnations. During this interlude he (or more properly, the soul) consciously works with the fruits of the experience of his past incarnation and prepares for the next.

† Commentary No. 690

Transition 2

The purpose (for man) of descent into matter (physical incarnation) is essentially to gain experience on the physical plane (in the human form) that is otherwise unattainable. We might consider this cyclical process of descent and re-ascent as analogous to a scientist who wishes to develop a theory (solve a problem). The scientist (soul) first designs an experiment. He (clothed in a personality) proceeds then to the laboratory (physical plane) to conduct the experiment (physical incarnation), and thereby gather data (experience) (quality) (character). Following this, he withdraws for what may be a lengthy period of analysis (assimilation) before he has gained the understanding requisite to designing the next most advantageous experiment in the sequence. He (clothed in a new personality) again returns to the laboratory.

This sequence is repeated until the theory is sufficiently developed (consciousness sufficiently evolved) that further experiments (incarnations) (in this particular field of endeavor (physical plane (consciousness)) are not necessary (meaning that subsequent experience is afforded on other levels or other fields). There is no denying that the laboratory phase is essential to the overall cycle, but it cannot be viewed as an end in itself, just as any particular physical life should be seen in relation to the greater life cycle of which it forms only a part.

That which most of humanity call death, but what spiritual students recognize to be only a transition (one in a series of transitions) of life and consciousness to a higher plane, occurs when the "will to be" of the soul is withdrawn from its physical form. This transition is marked by the detachment (snapping) of the sutratma (thread soul) (silver cord) from the dense physical vehicle.

When the soul incarnates (wills to be (express)), it does so via the extension of the sutratma into physical form. This life-current differentiates into two threads: the "individual consciousness stream" (thread), which is secured (focused) in the head, and the "dynamic life stream" (thread), which is secured in the heart (center). It is the individual life stream that controls and coordinates the physical molecules and atoms (all of which are lives in themselves) that compose the dense physical body, molding them and maintaining them as an integrated composite organism. The stream of "universal pranic energy," the life principle that vitalizes the individual lesser (elemental) lives, enters the body through the spleen, and ascends to join the life stream secured in the heart. The etheric body is the vehicle for this pranic energy that enlivens the organism (physical body).

When the soul withdraws from an incarnation (recalls the sutratma), the life thread reunites with the consciousness thread, and this magnetic cord is severed from its point of focus in the heart, thus terminating the link of the higher vehicles to the physical body. The permanent physical atom (the small force center embodying the physical quality abstracted from each incarnation and the archetype of the physical body for subsequent incarnations) is retained and withdrawn with the sutratma. Death and sleep are similar in that in both cases the higher vehicles are withdrawn from the dense physical. The important

distinction between them, though, is that in sleep, only the consciousness thread (secured in the head) is withdrawn (temporarily), thus causing the loss of physical consciousness, but allowing the focus of consciousness to shift to the higher (astral or mental) planes. The life thread, during sleep, remains secured in the heart.

† Commentary No. 697

Transition 3

Without the coordinating force of the life thread and the permeating etheric body to process the prana necessary to vitalizing the composite organism, the lesser lives (molecular and elemental) revert to a disorganized state and begin to decompose. They eventually return to their natural state of basic formlessness (only to be reformed in new ways in other times). It is only the coordinated physical organism that is “dead.” The constituent atoms remain alive as individual units.

Following the detachment of the sutratma from the dense physical body, the etheric body, though liberated from its dense counterpart, is still drawn to it. The etheric body (at this point still enshrouding the subtle bodies) may be seen (clairvoyantly) hovering over the dense vehicle. Generally speaking, the pull of the soul is sufficiently strong to disengage the five higher principles from the etheric body relatively quickly (a few hours to days), except in the case of extreme material attachments or identification with (polarization on) the physical plane. The ethereal corpse, once shed from the higher principles, remains near the dense one, and the two decompose synchronously.

Cremation of the dense physical body serves both to hasten the release of the subtle vehicles from the etheric body, and to provide the immediate restoration (restitution) of the physical elements composing the dense and ethereal corpses to the (respective) elemental reservoirs from which they may be again drawn for future forms. The purificatory flames which sweep away any negative forces associated with the old form provide an inherently more appropriate disposition of the body than does the slow deterioration and decay of interment. Indeed, cemeteries are seen, clairvoyantly, to be very “unfortunate” (if not ghastly) fields of decaying ethereal corpses. As human consciousness evolves, cremation

will become increasingly more widely accepted and preferred, and the unhealthy blights that cemeteries are on the etheric (and psychic) body of the planet will be phased out.

Regarding the custom of funerals, memorial services, and the mourning which often accompanies them (and may continue for years in the case of strongly attached friends and family members): prior to death, the student should either make the necessary arrangements for his eventual cremation or advise those responsible for making the arrangements of his wishes. He should also convey his wishes (to those responsible) regarding the nature and tone of whatever memorial service there might be (if any). A memorial service should be of a positive nature, emphasizing appropriate release and return as transition is made from one phase of the life cycle to the next. The memorial service should offer encouragement to those remaining to release their attachments, that the individual may progress onward to the next phase unencumbered by the chains of emotion that would tend to bind him to the physical and lower astral planes.

While it is natural to experience a period of necessary "adjustment" to the transition (physical death) of a loved one, intense grief or an extended period of mourning is inappropriate and often indicative of self-centeredness, rather than a true love that releases and encourages the individual who has transitioned to similarly release his attachments and move onward in consciousness. Unhappily, many individuals (after physical death) are detained far longer than is necessary on the lower levels of the astral plane due to such attachments (which often are intensely felt by the deceased). Some attachments are so strong that they prevent the individual's further progress until his "loved ones" have themselves transitioned from the physical plane.

Transition 4

Having shed the dense physical and etheric bodies, the individual (in his astral and mental bodies) passes progressively through the astral sub-planes. The region of the astral plane which characterizes the condition in consciousness of such individuals is often called kamaloka. The kamalokic condition exists on each of the astral sub-planes.

As a person experiences during physical life, matter from various astral sub-planes is built into the astral body, vivified, and utilized. The more evolved (purified) the individual becomes, the more matter from the higher sub-planes is built in, and matter of a grosser nature on the lower sub-planes is released. The passage through the astral sub-planes after the discarding of the physical body involves the exhausting of the attractions of the matter of the astral body on each sub-plane such that the grosser matter "falls away," and the individual may then progress, through affinity, to the next higher level (sub-plane) or state of consciousness. This describes the process of attrition of the astral body, the eventual elimination of which is referred to as the second death.

As long as desires persist relative to the earthly life, the individual may not progress onward, and the kamalokic experience then serves as a purgation, purifying and inducing eventual release from the binding desires. The lowest three (astral) kamalokic sub-planes are, for this reason, sometimes called "purgatory." During the purgatory experience, the individual reviews the "evil" (grosser) (more negative) (ignorant) acts of the earthly life, until sufficiently freed from the matter (desires) of these lower levels.

The fourth (astral) kamalokic sub-plane is sometimes called "the borderland," and the three highest (astral) kamalokic sub-planes are sometimes referred to as "the first heaven." In general, the state after physical death (in the kamalokic state) for the average person is much "happier" than life in the physical form. The individual in the "heaven" region (condition) (state of consciousness) enjoys far greater freedom than when hampered by material conditions. Since he is able to create whatever world he wishes via his thoughts, his "heaven" would vary from the "heavens" of all of the other individuals similarly

participating in kamaloka. Astral pleasures (sensuous enjoyment) are much greater than those of physical incarnation, with considerable potential for distraction. The aspirant should endeavor to remain detached, that he might more rapidly pass through the astral levels (ever consistent with duty or service opportunity).

For the average man, the kamalokic experience is essentially a continuance of the attractions and tendencies of the physical incarnation. The aspirant, however, who has participated in active service on the astral plane during sleep, finds himself (after physical death), in the familiar field of that service. He is able to devote himself to continuous service in this field, rather than being confined to the intervals allotted by earthly sleep. Furthermore, karmic law applies to the individual whether in or out of physical incarnation. Wherever a man's consciousness may be developed, wherever he has the ability to make choices and act upon them, these actions will contribute to his future karmic condition (possibly manifesting in the next incarnation). Therefore, the kamalokic experience, while potentially one of extreme sensuous pleasure (absorption) may rather be (much more constructively) (if the aspirant applies himself properly) one of definite spiritual progress, learning, and opportunity for service.

† Commentary No. 705

Transition 5

The process of attrition (the gradual exhausting of the attractions on each astral sub-plane) of the astral body relates primarily to the emotionally-polarized (average) person. It is generally a fairly slow (from an earthly time perspective) process. Those who are approaching mental polarization (utilizing essentially a kama-manasic rather than purely kamic vehicle) may practice a more conscious, more deliberate withdrawal process from the astral body in response to the attraction of the developing mental body. By utilization of mental will they may actually "shatter" the kama-manasic body, and progress onward to the mental plane.

The mentally-polarized person (possessing an integrated personality), who is aligned with the soul (or is rapidly approaching soul alignment) (vice the

majority of mentally-polarized who are not so aligned) simply refuses, while in physical incarnation, to allow himself to fall under the influence (dictate) of desire. For him, the attrition process and "dynamic negation" are consciously undertaken as a part of the physical incarnation, so that there is virtually no astral body to contend with. He passes rapidly through kamaloka. Whatever the polarization of the man in physical incarnation, there is a clear value in his endeavoring to consciously recognize (and overcome) the desires that bind him, the emotions that resist mental redirection and control. Through such endeavor (for example, as part of an evening retrospection), he can improve both the quality of the immediate physical incarnation, and prepare himself for a more expedient assimilation of experience after the physical death.

With the discarding of the astral body (second death), the individual is ready to transition to the mental (manasic) plane. A period of "unconscious gestation" is undergone at this point. This intermediary gestation period provides the opportunity for vivification of the mental body and consolidation (absorption) of the quality to be carried forward into subsequent incarnations via (within) the astral permanent atom.

Upon emergence from this gestation period, the individual functions (on the lower four levels (sub-planes) of the mental plane) through the mental body, which is the only remaining vehicle of the last personality incarnation. Consciousness is, at this point, focused in what is called the rupaloka (form, concrete, region) of devachan (sometimes called second heaven). The joy and bliss of devachan is of a much higher order than the corresponding "pleasures" of kamaloka (first heaven of the astral plane), but it is of a distinctly (intensely) mental nature. By the time the individual enters into the devachic consciousness, the negative (coarse) aspects (qualities) of the incarnation have been released (via the kamalokic experience or the conscious efforts made while in incarnation); therefore, only the positive (higher) (altruistic) qualities of the mental life are carried forward. The assimilation of mental experiences of the incarnation is one of the principal occupations of the devachic (devachanic) experience.

An individual is only able to partake of the opportunities of devachan to the extent to which the mental body is developed and prepared. The average emotionally-polarized person is not capable of participation to a large extent in

the mental world, and would consequently spend only a brief period (from the physical perspective) in devachan. The more developed the mentality (prior to soul alignment) the more there will be to assimilate, and the more potentially responsive the individual may be to the enhancement and learning opportunities offered on the mental plane.

† Commentary No. 706

Transition 6

Devachan has been called "a state of intense selfishness during which the soul reaps the reward of its unselfishness on earth." The devachic selfishness is due to the pleasures experienced as a "separated unit" as opposed to the nirvanic experience of participation in the group condition (in which each unit partakes of the "group realization" leading to bliss for the individual units). Devachan is the reflection (on the personality level) of nirvana (that condition in consciousness into which the soul may pass only after the higher initiations have been taken and the necessity for further incarnations is transcended) or transpersonal reality.

Long periods of time (from the physical plane perspective) are generally spent in devachan by those who have had mentally enriched and mentally active incarnations. The length of time of the assimilation process is directly related to the ability of the individual to "meditate upon experience." For the mentally-polarized (integrated) person who is aligned with or reasonably responsive to the soul, however, the pleasures of devachan pale by comparison with that which is sensed (known) to lie beyond in nirvana. Disciples and initiates upon the spiritual path generally, therefore, renounce devachan (or spend a much abbreviated period there). Having consciously practiced the devachic experience of assimilation while in incarnation, and having to some extent developed a "continuity of consciousness," disciples and initiates have little need for further review. They thus generally elect to pass onward, often returning more rapidly to physical incarnation to continue (fulfill) their (group) work and karmic and service obligations.

In addition to the assimilation of the mental experience (working up of character) of the past incarnation, the other major occupation of devachan is the

preparation for the next incarnation. It is in devachan that a person learns the theory (technique) of building his vehicles. The physical plane is the laboratory in which he actually gains experience in the use of the vehicles constructed. By natural law, an individual (soul) cannot inhabit a body (on any of the planes) that is more sophisticated than he is able to build for himself. Each incarnation brings the opportunity for refinement, working from the basic quality carried forward in the permanent atoms. With each incarnation, the person should advance in the ability to create vehicles that are more suited to evolutionary purpose, and, later upon the spiritual path, to the wielding of energies (power) for spiritual purposes.

Eventually, when the assimilation of the experiences of the past incarnation is complete, the mental body drops away (the third death), as have the astral, etheric, and dense physical bodies when their respective purposes for the incarnation were fulfilled. Throughout the "heaven-life" (on astral and concrete mental levels), the personality of the last incarnation is retained, but at the point when the consciousness is at last drawn onto the arupa (formless, abstract) sub-planes of the mental plane, that personality incarnation experience is essentially completed. The permanent atoms for each vehicle are withdrawn with the sutratma into the causal body. The causal body (vehicle of the soul) came into existence at the moment of individualization. It therefore contains (embraces) the abstracted quality of not just the past incarnation, but all of the student's incarnations since he individualized.

At this level, the previous lives are not perceived as "past," but are ever "present" in the greater consciousness. The soul essentially integrates the experience (quality) of the many lives such that it is realized as but one life.

Transition 7

An individual's opportunity (quality of participation) on any plane of manifestation is determined by the relative development (evolution) of his consciousness. Just as the devachic experience on the lower levels of the mental plane is limited by the individual's mental development and refinement, experience on the higher (arupa) levels in the causal body requires even further development of an increasingly abstract, spiritual nature. As part of the cycle between death and rebirth, the individual must participate in experience on (or at least symbolically "touch") the higher mental levels, but the duration and quality of this participation varies tremendously. Participation for the relatively unevolved is of a brief unconscious or semi-conscious nature; more highly evolved individuals participate in full consciousness.

The recognition of the "eternal now" (simultaneous awareness of past, present, and future) is inherent in participation on higher mental (causal) levels. The life cycle is a continuous process, a series of transitions from one state to another, rather than discrete events that can be clearly demarcated (e.g., the process of the transition from the physical plane (death) may elapse over a number of years during which the consciousness (focus of the soul) is slowly withdrawn, while the actual event of "death" (the disassociation of the sutratma from the physical body) is the culmination of that process). In the portion of the greater life cycle which comes between physical death and rebirth (bardo), the higher (arupa) mental plane experience can be considered the transition between the close of the "after death" states and the commencement of a new birth. With the consciousness unfettered by the lower vehicles and centered in the causal body (soul), a more integrated picture of the past life may be realized. The resultant gains, in terms of quality of consciousness of that life may be appreciated relative to the quality of all preceding lives. Further, an individual is permitted the opportunity to glimpse (in a rather general sense) the predispositions and opportunities of the next incarnation.

Just as the postmortem review (in kamaloka) of the experience of the previous incarnation is intended to facilitate understanding of how certain effects in the life proceeded from certain causes, the preview (glimpse) of the next incarnation

is intended to further encourage understanding of the coming karmic lessons. The effects that will manifest lie latent in the causes of previous lives. To the extent to which he can recognize these causes, the individual may be aware of the future effects and progress in consciousness that is intended for the next incarnation through the working out of his karma. In this sense, the preview of the coming life is not so much a prediction or a prophecy as it is an indication of the karmic opportunity that lies ahead. It is left to the individual to make what he will of that opportunity.

After having thus “touched” (contacted) his soul, the as yet unperfected individual will be drawn again into preparations for physical rebirth. It is desire (kama) or trishna (thirst) for further physical experience that leads the individual to respond magnetically to the pull back to incarnation. So long as imperfections and the need for assimilation of the kind of experience only the physical domain can offer persist, the individual will continue to respond (of his own desire) to the call of descent to earth life.

While the physical birth is a significant point in the transition cycle, it is only one of the events in the much broader process of descent into incarnation that actually continues after the physical birth (for about seven years) until the causal body is fully linked (the sutratma firmly anchored).

† Commentary No. 714

Transition 8

In preparation for physical incarnation, the individual first “sounds his own true note into the substance of the three worlds.” He revitalizes his permanent atoms, and as he descends first onto the lower mental plane, he magnetically gathers the material (mental elemental) substance to form his mental body. The substance which he attracts on any level must be compatible in quality with the development of his personality matrix (within the permanent atoms). He is thus restricted to substance which he has earned through previous development and refinement. As he descends further to the astral plane, he similarly attracts the needed (deserved) material consistent with his emotional development and refinement. Thus, in the process of descent to incarnation, ready-made mental

and astral bodies are not provided for the individual, only the substance from which the bodies are built during the incarnation itself. Descending to the etheric plane, the individual works with the substance of the vital body in shaping the seven centers, preparing them as recipients of higher forces. He there awaits the opportunity for a physical vehicle.

The vast majority of humanity are not sufficiently developed to deliberately choose a physical body for themselves. Since there is generally much left to develop, any one of many possible bodies (and corresponding life circumstances) may be suitable to the evolutionary goals and karmic opportunities that are to be dealt with in a given lifetime. Thus, it is primarily karmic law (including the force of personal relationships from past lives) that determines most births. Since more highly evolved individuals have fewer, more specific lessons to learn, suitable opportunities for them are rarer. Advanced spiritual students, returning to incarnation in response to the service objectives or work of an esoteric group may exercise some degree of choice in the circumstances of their birth for service (dharma).

Formulae may be found in the metaphysical literature for the duration of the bardo (interval between death and rebirth). Most of these systems and the averages reported are misleading. The bardo may vary from a matter of months (in special cases) to thousands of years. Generally, the bardo for the relatively unevolved is fairly short, there being insufficient consciousness on any of the higher planes conducive to lengthy periods of assimilation.

Similarly, the bardo for an individual who passed out of the previous incarnation during childhood would tend to be short due to the relative little opportunity for experience that would require assimilation. As an individual evolves, becoming emotionally polarized and later mentally polarized, more time would be spent in assimilation on the astral and mental planes, respectively. The individual with a well-developed, integrated, personality would generally experience the longest bardo (due to his ability to participate more fully in a lengthy devachan). But when the individual becomes aligned with (or responsive to) the soul, the cycle shortens as he deliberately seeks a more expeditious return to incarnation for service and group (karmic) fulfillment.

Time exists only within the physical brain consciousness and not for the disincarnated. The time that elapses on the physical plane between lives may seem significant, but the perspective on the higher planes is very different. The individual descends through the three worlds (mental, astral, and physical planes) and re-ascends, repeatedly. The wheel of rebirth is actually more of a spiral. At each turn of the spiral the consciousness is raised (generally) (somewhat) until at some point the need for further experience in the three worlds is transcended, and the perfected human moves on to loftier realms.

† Commentary No. 1187

Beyond the Wheel

While transition refers to movement, or passing through the various stages of life and death, of experience and assimilation and preparation for further experience, it is all a matter of being involved in the wheel of life. But as the spiritual student matures and fulfills all of the requirements (intended experience, development, abilities, balance, maturity, quality of consciousness, etc.) and (simultaneously) as a person's karma is fulfilled, the student eventually passes beyond the wheel.

Beyond the wheel is the realm of the soul as a soul, without a personality to encumber the soul consciousness. While the personality is necessary for lower experience, and while that experience contributes to the evolution of the soul (which is, after all, the unit of evolution, the unit of consciousness within the greater life), life at this (worldly) level is a very small part of universal manifestation. There is (much) life beyond the pale. But it is not life or consciousness as is known or appreciated at the personality level. There is no ego beyond this wheel. There is no personality. There is no thinking. There is no feeling in the lower sense. There is only subjective feeling in the higher sense of how the soul itself embraces the void (the real world, beyond this one).

What is known (knowable) (understandable) of life beyond the wheel is inferred from the quality and consciousness of the soul (atma-buddhi-manas) itself. If one embraces the soul (i.e., if one transcends the personality (ego) (intellect) entirely, even briefly) then one can sense its nature (as long as one does not

think about it). It is only in thus embracing the soul that a person can even discern the difference between the soul level and the personality level, and realize that virtually everything that is known and understood occurs at the personality level, that all "action" occurs at the personality level, that the ego is the barrier between the soul and its personality. But as the ego (barrier) is overcome, one begins to gradually sense the nature of the soul and the nature of life beyond. And then one gradually participates in that greater life.

As karma is fulfilled and a person is no longer required therefore to incarnate, there being no attachments or loose ends (needs for experience) to draw the person back into incarnation, there are a number of choices that the soul is confronted with (from the perspective of the personality there are choices (from the perspective of the soul there are no choices, there is only realization)). A soul may linger in proximity to humanity and this world, continuing to serve humanity and/or other lifewaves subjectively, from the level of the soul. Or a soul may pass on to some other lifewave or domain of activity (experience and service). The number of liberated souls is very, very small, but those who "stay" are fewer still and limited to the number that humanity merits. Ever there is balance, equilibrium. If humanity were more developed, if humanity were more responsive, then there would be more liberated souls and more of them would be allowed to remain with humanity, to assist from the soul level.

But beyond the wheel is another wheel and another. A never-ending spiral of lives within lives. Further evolution in consciousness (being). Further integration at the logoi level. Logoi in-the-making. Non-logoi in-the-making. There is never-ending transition. From one experience and expression to another. From one level to another. From one world to another. From one sense of Self to another.