

The Planes of Nature

From The Ancient Wisdom by Annie Besant

The Logos

The source from which a universe proceeds is a manifested Divine Being, to whom in the modern form of the Ancient Wisdom the name Logos or Word has been given. The name is drawn from Greek Philosophy, but perfectly expresses the ancient idea, the Word which emerges from the Silence, the Voice, the Sound, by which the worlds come into being. We must now trace the evolution of spirit-matter, in order that we may understand something of the nature of the materials with which we have to deal on the physical plane, or physical world.

Coming forth from the depths of the One Existence, from the One beyond all thought and all speech, a Logos, by imposing on Himself a limit, circumscribing voluntarily the range of His own Being, becomes the manifested God, and tracing the limiting sphere of His activity thus outlines the area of His universe. Within that sphere the universe is born, is evolved, and dies; it lives, it moves, it has its being in Him; its matter is His emanation; its forces and energies are currents of His Life; He is immanent in every atom, all-pervading, all-sustaining, all-evolving; He is its source and its end, its cause and its object, its center and circumference; it is built on Him as its sure foundation, it breathes in Him as its encircling space; He is in everything and everything in Him. Thus have the sages of the Ancient Wisdom taught us of the beginning of the manifested worlds.

Creation of the Planes

The Seventh Plane

Of what occurs on the two higher planes of the universe, the seventh and sixth, we can form but the haziest conception. The energy of the Logos as whirling motion of inconceivable rapidity “digs holes in space” in this root matter, and this vortex of life encased in a film of the root of matter is the primary atom; these and their aggregations, spread throughout the universe, form all the subdivisions of spirit-matter of the highest or seventh plane.

The Sixth Plane

The sixth plane is formed by some of the countless myriads of these primary atoms, setting up a vortex in the coarsest aggregations of their own plane, and this primary atom en-walled with spiral strands of the coarsest combinations of the seventh plane becomes the finest unit of spirit-matter, or atom of the sixth plane. These sixth plane atoms and their endless combinations form the subdivisions of the spirit-matter of the sixth plane.

The Fifth Plane and So Forth

The sixth-plane-atom, in its turn, sets up a vortex in the coarsest aggregations of its own plane, and, with these coarsest aggregations as a limiting wall, becomes the finest unit of spirit-matter, or atom, of the fifth plane. Again, these fifth-plane atoms, and their combinations form the subdivisions of the spirit-matter of the fifth plane.

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The process is repeated to form successively the spirit-matter of the fourth, the third, the second, and the first planes. These are the seven great regions of the universe, so far as their material constituents are concerned. A clearer idea of them will be gained by analogy when we come to master the modifications of the spirit-matter of our own physical world.

Analogy - The Veils of Matter

The student may find the conception clearer if he thinks of:

- The fifth plane atoms as Ātma
- Those of the fourth plane as Ātma enveloped in Buddhi-matter
- Those of the third plane as Ātma enveloped in Buddhi and Manas-matter
- Those of the second plane as Ātma enveloped in Buddhi-Manas- and Kāma-matter
- Those of the lowest as Ātma enveloped in Buddhi-Manas-Kāma and Sthūla-matter

Only the outermost is active in each, but the inner are there, though latent, ready to come into activity on the upward arc of evolution.

The Physical Plane

The Variety That Exists In the First Three States of Matter in the Physical World

Examining the materials belonging to the Physical, we are struck by their immense variety, the innumerable differences of constitution in the objects around us, minerals, vegetables, animals, all differing in their constituents: matter hard and soft, transparent and opaque, brittle and ductile, bitter and sweet, pleasant and nauseous, colored and colorless.

Out of this confusion three subdivisions of matter emerge as a fundamental classification: matter is solid, liquid, and gaseous. Further examination shows that these solids, liquids and gases are made up by combinations of much simpler bodies, called by chemists “elements,” and that these elements may exist in a solid, liquid, or gaseous condition without changing their respective natures.

Oxygen as Solid, Liquid and Gas

Thus the chemical element oxygen is a constituent of wood, and in combination with other elements forms the solid wood fibers; it exists in the sap with another element, yielding a liquid combination as water; and it exists also in it by itself as gas. Under these three conditions it is oxygen. Further, pure oxygen can be reduced from a gas to a liquid, and from a liquid to a solid, remaining pure oxygen all the time, and so with other elements. We thus obtain as three subdivisions, or conditions of matter on the physical plane, solid, liquid, gas.

Ether in its Four States

Searching further, we find a fourth condition, ether, and a minute search reveals that this ether exists in four conditions as well defined as those of solid, liquid and gas; to take oxygen again as an example: as it may be reduced from the gaseous condition to the liquid and the solid, so it may be raised from the gaseous through four etheric stages the last of which consists of the ultimate physical atom, the disintegration of the atom taking matter out of the physical plane altogether, and into the next plane above.

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Combinations of the Ultimate Physical Atom Produces Variety - Chart

In the annexed plate three gases are shown in the gaseous and four etheric states; it will be observed that the structure of the ultimate physical atom is the same for all, and that the variety of the “elements” is due to the variety of ways in which these ultimate physical atoms combine. Thus the seventh subdivision of physical spirit-matter is composed of homogeneous atoms; the sixth is composed of fairly simple heterogeneous combinations of these, each combination behaving as a unit; the fifth is composed of more complex combinations, and the fourth of still more complex ones, but in all cases these combinations act as units.

The Three Lower Subdivisions

The third subdivision consists of yet more complicated combinations, regarded by the chemist as gaseous atoms or “elements,” and on this subdivision many of the combinations have received special names, oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, chlorine, etc., and each newly discovered combination now receives its name; the second subdivision consists of combinations in the liquid condition, whether regarded as elements such as bromine, or as combinations such as water or alcohol ; the first subdivision is composed of all solids, again whether regarded as elements, such as iodine, gold, lead, etc., or as compounds, such as wood, stone, chalk, and so on.

Analogy – The Physical Plane Serves as a Model for the Higher Planes

The physical plane may serve the student as a model from which by analogy he may gain an idea of the subdivisions of spirit-matter of other planes. When a Theosophist speaks of a plane, he means a region throughout which spirit-matter exists, all whose combinations are derived from a particular set of atoms; these atoms, in turn, are units possessing similar organizations, whose life is the life of the Logos veiled in fewer or more coverings according to the plane, and whose form consists of the solid, or lowest subdivision of matter, of the plane immediately above. A plane is thus a division in nature, as well as a metaphysical idea.

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From *Occult Chemistry* by Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater

Chapter 2 - Details Of the Early Research

The article detailing the results of the research carried on in the year 1895 (see the November issue for that year of the magazine then called *Lucifer*), began with some general remarks about the clairvoyant faculty, already discussed in the preceding chapter. The original record then goes on as follows:—

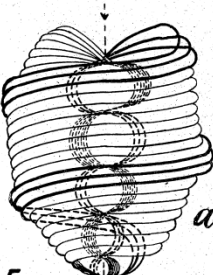
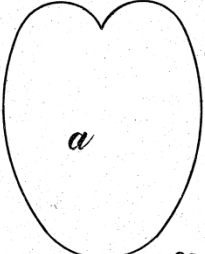
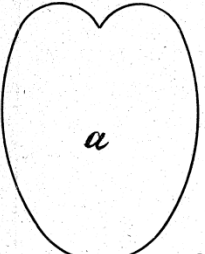
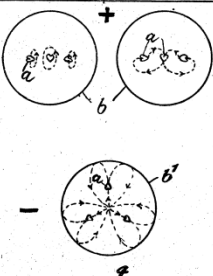
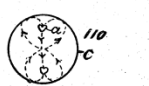
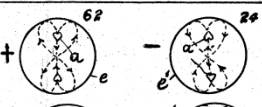
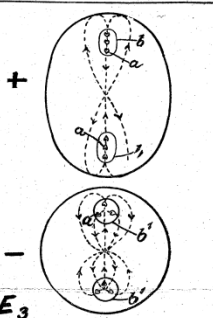
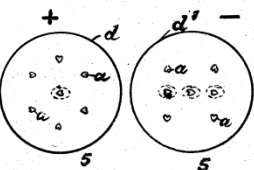
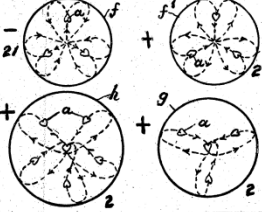
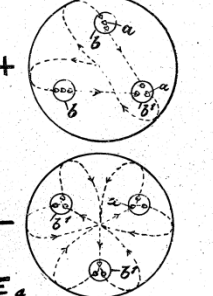
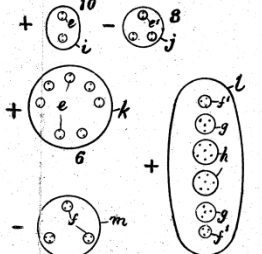
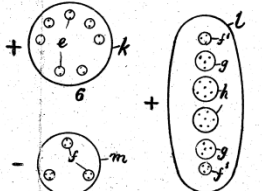
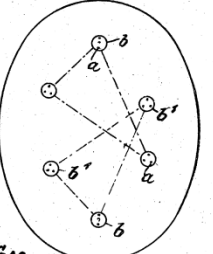
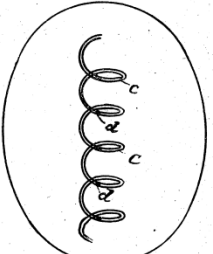
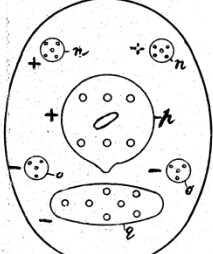
The physical world is regarded as being composed of between sixty and seventy chemical elements, [*In 2015, the periodic table contains 118 elements*] aggregated into an infinite variety of combinations. These combinations fall under the three main heads of solids, liquids and gases, the recognized substates of physical matter, with the theoretical ether scarcely admitted as material. Ether, to the scientist, is not a substate or even a state of matter, but is a something apart by itself. It would not be allowed that gold could be raised to the etheric condition as it might be to the liquid and gaseous; whereas the occultist knows that the gaseous is succeeded by the etheric, as the solid is succeeded by the liquid, and he knows also that the word "ether" covers four substates as distinct from each other as are the solids, liquids and gases, and that all chemical elements have their four etheric substates, the highest being common to all, and consisting of the ultimate physical atoms to which all elements are finally reducible. The chemical atom is regarded as the ultimate particle of any element, and is supposed to be indivisible and unable to exist in a free state. Mr. Crookes' researches have led the more advanced chemists to regard the atoms as compound, as a more or less complex aggregation of protyle¹.

To astral vision ether is a visible thing, and is seen permeating all substances and encircling every particle. A "solid" body is a body composed of a vast number of particles suspended in ether, each vibrating backwards and forwards in a particular field at a high rate of velocity; the particles are attracted towards each other more strongly than they are attracted by external influences, and they "cohere," or maintain towards each other a definite relation in space. Closer examination shows that the ether is not homogeneous but consists of particles of numerous kinds, differing in the aggregations of the minute bodies composing them; and a careful and more detailed method of analysis reveals that it has four distinct degrees, giving us, with the solid, liquid and gaseous, seven instead of four substates of matter in the physical world.

¹ A hypothetical base substance from which all chemical elements were believed to have been made; subatomic particles.

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 <p><i>E₁</i> <i>18</i></p>	 <p>290</p>	 <p>261</p>
 <p><i>E₂</i></p>	 <p>110</p>	 <p>62 24</p>
 <p><i>E₃</i></p>	 <p>5 5</p>	 <p>21 2</p>
 <p><i>E₄</i></p>	 <p>10 8</p>	 <p>6 7</p>
 <p>GAS</p>	 <p>LIQUID</p>	 <p>SOLID</p>
<p><i>H</i></p>	<p><i>O</i></p>	<p><i>N</i></p>

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These four etheric substates will be best understood if the method be explained by which they were studied. This method consisted of taking what is called an atom of gas, and breaking it up time after time, until what proved to be the ultimate physical atom was reached, the breaking up of this last resulting in the production of astral, and no longer physical matter.

Substates of Matter for Hydrogen, Oxygen and Nitrogen

It is, of course, impossible to convey by words the clear conceptions that are gained by direct vision of the objects of study, and the accompanying diagram—cleverly drawn from the description given by the investigators—is offered as a substitute, however poor, for the lacking vision of the readers. The horizontal lines separate from each other the seven substates of matter; solid, liquid, gas, ether 4, ether 3, ether 2, ether 1. On the gas level are represented three chemical atoms, one of hydrogen (H), one of oxygen (O), one of nitrogen (N). The successive changes undergone by each chemical atom are shown in the compartments vertically above it, the left-hand column showing the breaking up of the hydrogen atom, the middle column that of the oxygen atom, the right-hand column, that of the nitrogen atom. The ultimate physical atom is marked a, and is drawn only once, although it is the same throughout. The numbers 18, 290 and 261 are the numbers of the ultimate physical atoms found to exist in a chemical atom.

The dots indicate the lines along which force is observed to be playing, and the arrowheads show the direction of the force. No attempt has been made to show this below E 2 except in the case of the hydrogen. The letters given are intended to help the reader to trace upwards any special body; thus d in the oxygen chemical atom on the gas level may be found again on E 4, E 3, and E 2. It must be remembered that the bodies shown diagrammatically in no way indicate relative size; as a body is raised from one substate to the one immediately above it, it is enormously magnified for the purpose of investigation, and the ultimate atom on E 1 is represented by the dot a on the gaseous level.

Hydrogen

The first chemical atom selected for this examination was an atom of hydrogen (H). On looking carefully at it, it was seen to consist of six small bodies, contained in an egg-like form. It rotated with great rapidity on its own axis, vibrating at the same time, and the internal bodies performed similar gyrations. The whole atom spins and quivers, and has to be steadied before exact observation is possible. The six little bodies are arranged in two sets of three, forming two triangles that are not interchangeable, but are related to each other as object and image. (The lines in the diagram of it on the gaseous sub-plane are not lines of force, but show the two triangles; on a plane surface the interpenetration of the triangles cannot be clearly indicated.) Further, the six bodies are not all alike; they each contain three smaller bodies—each of these being an ultimate physical atom—but in two of them the three atoms are arranged in a line, while in the remaining four they are arranged in a triangle.

The wall of the limiting spheroid in which the bodies are enclosed being composed of the matter of the third, or gaseous, kind, drops away when the gaseous atom is raised to the next level, and the six bodies are set free. They at once re-arrange themselves in two triangles, each enclosed by a

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limiting sphere; the two marked b in the diagram unite with one of those marked b' to form a body which shows a positive character, the remaining three forming a second body negative in type. These form the hydrogen particles of the lowest plane of ether, marked E 4—ether 4—on the diagram. On raising these further, they undergo another disintegration, losing their limiting walls; the positive body of E 4, on losing its wall, becomes two bodies, one consisting of the two particles, marked b, distinguishable by the linear arrangement of the contained ultimate atoms, enclosed in a wall, and the other being the third body enclosed in E 4 and now set free.

The negative body of E 4 similarly, on losing its wall, becomes two bodies, one consisting of the two particles marked b', and the second the remaining body, being set free. These free bodies do not remain on E 3 but pass immediately to E 2, leaving the positive and negative bodies, each containing two particles, as the representatives of hydrogen on E 3. On taking these bodies a step higher their wall disappears, and the internal bodies are set free, those containing the atoms arranged lineally being positive, and those with the triangular arrangement being negative. These two forms represent hydrogen on E 2, but similar bodies of this state of matter are found entering into other combinations, as may be seen by referring to f on E 2 of nitrogen (N). On raising these bodies yet one step further, the falling away of the walls sets the contained atoms free, and we reach the ultimate physical atom, the matter of E 1. The disintegration of this sets free particles of astral matter, so that we have reached in this the limit of physical matter. The Theosophical reader will notice with interest that we can thus observe seven distinct substates of physical matter, and no more.

The ultimate atom, which is the same in all the observed cases, is an exceedingly complex body, and only its main characteristics are given in the diagram. It is composed entirely of spirals, the spiral being in its turn composed of spirillæ, and these again of minuter spirillæ. A fairly accurate drawing is given in Babbitt's "Principles of Light and Colour," p. 102. The illustrations there given of atomic combinations are entirely wrong and misleading, but if the stove-pipe run through the centre of the single atom be removed, the picture may be taken as correct, and will give some idea of the complexity of this fundamental unit of the physical universe.

Turning to the force side of the atom and its combinations, we observe that force pours in the heart-shaped depression at the top of the atom, and issues from the point, and is changed in character by its passage; further, force rushes through every spiral and every spirilla, and the changing shades of colour that flash out from the rapidly revolving and vibrating atom depend on the several activities of the spirals; sometimes one, sometimes another, is thrown into more energetic action, and with the change of activity from one spiral to another the colour changes.

The building of a gaseous atom of hydrogen may be traced downward from E 1, and, as stated above, the lines given in the diagram are intended to indicate the play of the forces which bring about the several combinations. Speaking generally, positive bodies are marked by their contained atoms setting their points towards each other and the centre of their combination, and repelling each other outwards; negative bodies are marked by the heart-shaped depressions being turned inwards, and by a tendency to move towards each other instead of away. Every combination begins by a welling up of force at a centre, which is to form the centre of the combination; in the first positive hydrogen combination, E 2, an atom revolving at right angles to the plane of the paper and

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also revolving on its own axis, forms the centre, and force, rushing out at its lower point, rushes in at the depressions of two other atoms, which then set themselves with their points to the centre; the lines are shown in +b, right-hand figure. (The left-hand figure indicates the revolution of the atoms each by itself.) As this atomic triad whirls round, it clears itself a space, pressing back the undifferentiated matter of the plane, and making to itself a whirling wall of this matter, thus taking the first step towards building up the chemical hydrogen atom. A negative atomic triad is similarly formed, the three atoms being symmetrically arranged round the centre of out-welling force. These atomic triads then combine, two of the linear arrangement being attracted to each other, and two of the triangular, force again welling up and forming a centre and acting on the triads as on a single atom, and a limiting wall being again formed as the combination revolves round its centre. The next stage is produced by each of these combinations on E 3 attracting to itself a third atomic triad of the triangular type from E 2, by the setting up of a new centre of up-welling force, following the lines traced in the combinations of E 4. Two of these uniting, and their triangles interpenetrating, the chemical atom is formed, and we find it to contain in all eighteen ultimate physical atoms.

Oxygen

The next substance investigated was oxygen, a far more complicated and puzzling body; the difficulties of observation were very much increased by the extraordinary activity shown by this element and the dazzling brilliancy of some of its constituents. The gaseous atom is an ovoid body, within which a spirally-coiled snake-like body revolves at a high velocity, five brilliant points of light shining on the coils. The snake appears to be a solid rounded body, but on raising the atom to E 4 the snake splits lengthwise into two waved bodies, and it is seen that the appearance of solidity is due to the fact that these spin round a common axis in opposite directions, and so present a continuous surface, as a ring of fire can be made by whirling a lighted stick. The brilliant bodies seen in the atom are on the crests of the waves in the positive snake, and in the hollows in the negative one; the snake itself consists of small bead-like bodies, eleven of which interpose between the larger brilliant spots. On raising these bodies to E 3 the snakes break up, each bright spot carrying with it six beads on one side and five on the other; these twist and writhe about still with the same extraordinary activity, reminding one of fire-flies stimulated to wild gyrations. It can be seen that the larger brilliant bodies each enclose seven ultimate atoms, while the beads each enclose two. (Each bright spot with its eleven beads is enclosed in a wall, accidentally omitted in the diagram.) On the next stage, E 2, the fragments of the snakes break up into their constituent parts; the positive and negative bodies, marked d and d', showing a difference of arrangement of the atoms contained in them. These again finally disintegrate, setting free the ultimate physical atoms, identical with those obtained from hydrogen. The number of ultimate atoms contained in the gaseous atom of oxygen is 290, made up as follows:—

2 in each bead, of which there are 110:

7 in each bright spot, of which there are 10;

$2 \times 110 + 70 = 290$.

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When the observers had worked out this, they compared it with the number of ultimate atoms in hydrogen:—

$$290 / 18 = 16.11 +$$

The respective number of ultimate atoms contained in a chemical atom of these two bodies are thus seen to closely correspond with their accepted weight-numbers.

It may be said in passing that a chemical atom of ozone appears as an oblate spheroid, with the contained spiral much compressed and widened in the centre; the spiral consists of three snakes, one positive and two negative, formed in a single revolving body. On raising the chemical atom to the next plane, the snake divides into three, each being enclosed in its own egg.

Nitrogen

The chemical atom of nitrogen was the third selected by the students for examination, as it seemed comparatively quiet in contrast with the ever-excited oxygen. It proved, however, to be the most complicated of all in its internal arrangements, and its quiet was therefore a little deceptive. Most prominent was the balloon-shaped body in the middle, with six smaller bodies in two horizontal rows and one large egg-shaped one in the midst, contained in it. Some chemical atoms were seen in which the internal arrangement of these contained bodies was changed and the two horizontal rows became vertical; this change seemed to be connected with a greater activity of the whole body, but the observations on this head are too incomplete to be reliable. The balloon-shaped body is positive, and is apparently drawn downwards towards the negative egg-shaped body below it, containing seven smaller particles. In addition to these large bodies, four small ones are seen, two positive and two negative, the positive containing five and the negative four minuter spots. On raising the gaseous atom to E 4, the falling away of the wall sets free the six contained bodies, and both the balloon and the egg round themselves, apparently with the removal of their propinquity, as though they had exercised over each other some attractive influence. The smaller bodies within the egg—marked q on E 4—are not on one plane, and those within n and o form respectively square-based and triangular-based pyramids. On raising all these bodies to E 3 we find the walls fall away as usual, and the contents of each "cell" are set free: p of E 4 contains six small bodies marked k, and these are shown in k of E 3, as containing each seven little bodies—marked e—each of which has within it two ultimate atoms; the long form of p E 4—marked l—appears as the long form l on E 3, and this has three pairs of smaller bodies within it, f', g and h, containing respectively three, four and six ultimate atoms; q of E 4, with its seven contained particles, m, has three particles m on E 3, each showing three ultimate atoms within them; e from n of E 4 becomes i of E 3, with contained bodies, e, showing two ultimate atoms in each; while e' from o of E 4 becomes j of E 3, each having three smaller bodies within it, e', with two ultimate atoms in each. On E 2, the arrangement of these ultimate atoms is shown, and the pairs, f', g and h are seen with the lines of force indicated; the triads in f—from m of E 3—are similarly shown, and the duads in e and e'—from i and j of E 3—are given in the same way. When all these bodies are raised to E 1, the ultimate physical atoms are set free, identical, of course, with that previously described.

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Reckoning up the number of ultimate physical atoms in a chemical atom of nitrogen we find they amount to 261, thus divided:—

$$62 + \text{bodies with 2 ultimate atoms, } 62 \times 2 = 124$$

$$24 - \text{ " " 2 " " } 24 \times 2 = 48$$

$$21 - \text{ " " 3 " " } 21 \times 3 = 63$$

$$2 + \text{ " " 3 " " } 2 \times 3 = 6$$

$$2 + \text{ " " 4 " " } 2 \times 4 = 8$$

$$2 + \text{ " " 4 " " } 2 \times 6 = 12$$

261

This again approaches closely the weight-number assigned to nitrogen:—

$$261 / 18 = 14.44 +$$

This is interesting as checking the observations, for weight-numbers are arrived at in so very different a fashion, and especially in the case of nitrogen the approximation is noteworthy, from the complexity of the bodies which yield the number on analysis.

Some other observations were made which went to show that as weight-numbers increased, there was a corresponding increase in the number of bodies discerned within the chemical atom; thus, gold showed forty-seven contained bodies; but these observations need repetition and checking. Investigation of a molecule of water revealed the presence of twelve bodies from hydrogen and the characteristic snake of oxygen, the encircling walls of the chemical atoms being broken away. But here again, further observations are necessary to substantiate details. The present paper is only offered as a suggestion of an inviting line of research, promising interesting results of a scientific character; the observations recorded have been repeated several times and are not the work of a single investigator, and they are believed to be correct so far as they go.

There is more on this at:

<http://www.anandgholap.net/AB CWL Occult Chemistry.htm>

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The Astral Plane

General Description

The astral plane is the region of the universe next to the physical, if the word “next” may be permitted in such a connection. Life there is more active than on the physical plane, and form is more plastic. The spirit-matter of that plane is more highly vitalized and finer than any grade of spirit-matter in the physical world. For, as we have seen, the ultimate physical atom, the constituent of the rarest physical ether, has for its sphere-wall innumerable aggregations of the coarsest astral matter. The word “next” is, however, inappropriate, as suggesting the idea that the planes of the universe are arranged as concentric circles, one ending where the next begins. Rather they are concentric interpenetrating spheres, not separated from each other by distance but by difference of constitution.

The Astral World Permeates the Physical World

As air permeates water, as ether permeates the densest solid, and so does astral matter permeate all physical. The astral world is above us, below us, on every side of us, through us; we live and move in it, but it is intangible, invisible, inaudible, imperceptible, because the prison of the physical body shuts us away from it, the physical particles being too gross to be set in vibration by astral matter.

The Astral Plane, Its Seven Subdivisions and How They Look

The spirit-matter of the astral plane exists in seven subdivisions, as we have seen in the spirit-matter of the physical. There, as here, there are numberless combinations, forming the astral solids, liquids, gases, and ethers.

But most material forms there have a brightness, a translucency, as compared to forms here, which have caused the epithet astral, or starry, to be applied to them – an epithet which is, on the whole, misleading, but is too firmly established by use to be changed. As there are no specific names for the subdivisions of astral spirit-matter, we may use the terrestrial designations. The main idea to be grasped is that astral objects are combinations of astral matter, as physical objects are combinations of physical matter, and that the astral world scenery much resembles that of earth in consequence of its being largely made up of the astral duplicates of physical objects.

One peculiarity, however, arrests and confuses the untrained observer; partly because of the translucency of astral objects, and partly because of the nature of astral vision – consciousness being less hampered by the finer astral matter than when encased in the terrestrial – everything is transparent, its back is visible as its front, its inside as its outside. Some experience is needed, therefore, ere objects are correctly seen, and a person who has developed astral vision, but has not yet had much experience in its use, is apt to receive the most topsy-turvy impressions and to fall into the most astounding blunders.

The Swiftiness of Astral Forms

Another striking and at first bewildering characteristic of the astral world is the swiftiness with which forms – especially when unconnected with any terrestrial matrix – change their outlines.

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An astral entity will change his whole appearance with the most startling rapidity, for astral matter takes the form under every impulse of thought, the life swiftly remolding the form to give itself new expression. As the great life-wave of the evolution of form passed downwards through the astral plane, and constituted on that plane the third elemental kingdom, the Monad drew round itself combinations of astral matter, giving to these combinations – entitled elemental essence – a peculiar vitality and the characteristic of responding to, and instantly taking shape under, the impulse of thought vibrations.

This elemental essence exists in hundreds of varieties on every subdivision of the astral plane, as though the air became visible here – as indeed it may be seen in quivering waves under great heat – and were in constant undulatory motion with changing colors like mother-of-pearl.

Thought Forms

This vast atmosphere of elemental essence is ever answering to vibrations caused by thoughts, feelings, and desires, and is thrown into commotion by a rush of any of these like bubbles in boiling water.² The duration of the form depends on the strength of the impulse to which it owes its birth; the clearness of its outline depends on the precision of the thinking, and the color depends on the quality – intellectual, devotional, passionate – of the thought.

Creation of Thought Forms

The vague loose thoughts which are so largely produced by undeveloped minds gather round themselves loose clouds of elemental essence when they arrive in the astral world, and drift about, attracted here and there to other clouds of a similar nature, clinging round the astral bodies of persons whose magnetism attracts them – either good or evil – and after a while disintegrating, to again form a part of the general atmosphere of elemental essence. While they maintain a separate existence they are living entities, with bodies of elemental essence and thoughts as the ensouling lives, and they are then called artificial elementals, or thought-forms.

Clear, precise thoughts have each their own definite shapes, with sharp clean outlines, and show an endless variety of designs. They are shaped by vibrations set up by thought, just as on the physical plane we find figures which are shaped by vibrations set up by sound. “Voice-figures” offer a very fair analogy for “thought-figures,” for nature, with all her infinite variety, is very conservative of principles, and reproduces the same methods of working on plane after plane in her realms.

² C.W. Leadbeater, Astral Plane, p. 52

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Kāmaloka

General Description

Kāmaloka, literally the place or habitat of desire, is, as has already been intimated, a part of the astral plane, not divided from it as a distinct locality, but separated off by the conditions of consciousness of the entities belonging to it. ³

These are human beings who have lost their physical bodies by the stroke of death, and have to undergo certain purifying changes before they can pass on to the happy and peaceful life which belongs to the man proper, to the human soul. ⁴

Kāmaloka as Purgatory

This region represents and includes the conditions described as existing in the various hells, purgatories, and intermediate states, one or other of which is alleged by all the great religions to be the temporary dwelling-place of man after he leaves the body and before he reaches “heaven.”

It does not include any place of eternal torture, the endless hell still believed in by some narrow religionists being only a nightmare dream of ignorance, hate and fear. But it does include conditions of suffering, temporary and purificatory in their nature, the working out of causes set going in his earth-life by the man who experiences them. These are as natural and inevitable as any effects caused in this world by wrongdoing, for we live in a world of law and every seed must grow up after its own kind. Death makes no sort of difference in a man's moral and mental nature, and the change of state caused by passing from one world to another takes away his physical body, but leaves the man as he was.

The Kāmalokic condition is found on each subdivision of the astral plane, so that we may speak of it as having seven regions, calling them the first, second, third, up to the seventh, beginning from the lowest and counting upwards. ⁵

Density Segregates

We have already seen that materials from each subdivision of the astral plane enter into the composition of the astral body, and it is a peculiar rearrangement of these materials, to be explained in a moment, which separates the people dwelling in one region from those dwelling in another, although those in the same region are able to intercommunicate. The regions, being each a subdivision of the astral plane, differ in density, and the density of the external form of the

³ The Hindus call this state Pretaloka, the habitat of Pretas. A Preta is a human being who has lost his physical body, but is still encumbered with the vesture of his animal nature. He cannot carry this on with him, and until it is disintegrated he is kept imprisoned by it.

⁴ The soul is the human intellect, the link between the Divine Spirit in man and his lower personality. It is the Ego, the individual, the “I”, which develops by evolution. In Theosophical parlance, it is Manas, the Thinker. The mind is the energy of this, working within the limitations of the physical brain, or the astral and mental bodies.

⁵ Often these regions are reckoned the other way, taking the first as the highest and the seventh as the lowest. It does not matter from which end we count; and I am reckoning upwards to keep them in accord with the planes and principles.

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Kâmalokic entity determines the region to which he is limited; these differences of matter are the barriers that prevent passage from one region to another; the people dwelling in one can no more come into touch with people dwelling in another than a deep-sea fish can hold a conversation with an eagle – the medium necessary to the life of the one would be destructive to the life of the other.

The Mental Plane

General Description

The mental plane is that which is next to the astral, and is separated from it only by differences of materials, just as the astral is separated from the physical. In fact, we may repeat what was said as to the astral and the physical with regard to the mental and the astral.

Life on the Mental Plane Is More Active Than the Astral

Life on the mental plane is more active than on the astral, and form is more plastic. The spirit-matter of that plane is more highly vitalized and finer than any grade of matter in the astral world. The ultimate atom of astral matter has innumerable aggregations of the coarsest mental matter for its encircling sphere-world, so that the disintegration of the astral atom yields a mass of mental matter of the coarsest kinds. Under these circumstances it will be understood that the play of the life-forces on this plane will be enormously increased in activity, there being so much less mass to be moved by them. The matter is in constant ceaseless motion, taking form under every thrill of life, and adapting itself without hesitation to every changing motion. “Mind-stuff,” as it has been called, makes astral spirit-matter seem clumsy, heavy, and lusterless, although compared with the physical spirit-matter it is so fairy-light and luminous.

The Mental Plane is our Home

But the law of analogy holds good, and gives us a clue to guide us through this super astral region, the region that is our birthplace and our home, although, imprisoned in a foreign land, we know it not, and gaze at descriptions of it with the eyes of aliens.

Subdivisions of the Mental Plane

Once again here, as on the two lower planes, the subdivisions of the spirit-matter of the plane are seven in number. Once again, these varieties enter into countless combinations, of every variety of complexity, yielding the solids, liquids, gases, and ethers of the mental plane. The word “solid” seems indeed absurd, when speaking of even the most substantial forms of mind-stuff; yet as they are dense in comparison with other kinds of mental materials, and as we have no descriptive words save such as are based on physical conditions, we must even use it for lack of a better.

Enough if we understand that this plane follows the general law and order of Nature, which is, for our globe, the septenary basis, and that the seven subdivisions of matter are of lessening densities, relatively to each other, as the physical solids, liquids, gases, and ethers; the seventh, or highest, subdivision being composed exclusively of the mental atoms.

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The Rūpa and Arūpa Headings

These subdivisions are grouped under two headings, to which the somewhat inefficient and unintelligible epithets “formless” and “form” have been assigned.⁶ The lower four – the first, second, third, and fourth subdivisions – are grouped together as “with form”; the higher three – the fifth, sixth and seventh subdivisions – are grouped as “formless.” The grouping is necessary, for the distinction is a real one, although one difficult to describe, and the regions are related in consciousness to the divisions in the mind itself – as will appear more plainly a little farther on.

The distinction may perhaps be best expressed by saying that in the lower four subdivisions the vibrations of consciousness give rise to forms, to images or pictures, and every thought appears as a living shape; whereas in the higher three, consciousness, though still, of course, setting up vibrations, seems rather to send them out as a mighty stream of living energy, which does not body itself into distinct images while it remains in this higher region, but which steps up a variety of forms all linked by some common condition when it rushes into the lower worlds.

Triangle Analogy: The Higher and Lower Mental Planes

The nearest analogy that I can find for the conception I am trying to express is that of abstract and concrete thoughts; an abstract idea of a triangle has no form, but connotes any plane figure contained within three right lines, the angles of which make two right angles; such an idea, with conditions but without shape, thrown into the lower world, may give birth to a vast variety of figures, right-angled, isosceles, scalene, of any color and size, but all filling the conditions – concrete triangles each one with a definite shape of its own.

Difficulty in Describing the Higher regions in terms of the Lower

The impossibility of giving in words a lucid exposition of the difference in the action of consciousness in the two regions is due to the fact that words are the symbols of images and belong to the workings of the lower mind in the brain, and are based wholly upon those workings; while the “formless” region belongs to the Pure Reason, which never works within the narrow limits of language.

Archetypal Ideas

The mental plane is that which reflects the Universal Mind in Nature, the plane which in our little system corresponds with that of the Great Mind in the Kosmos.⁷ In its higher regions exist all the archetypal ideas which are now in course of concrete evolution and in its lower the working out of these into successive forms, to be duly reproduced in the astral and physical worlds.

⁶ Arūpa, without form: rūpa, form. Rūpa is form, shape, body.

⁷ Mahat, the Third Logos, or Divine Creative Intelligence, the Brahmā of the Hindus, the Mandjusri of the Northern Buddhists, the Holy Spirit of the Christians.

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Thought Forms

Its materials are capable of combining under the impulse of thought vibrations, and can give rise to any combination which thought can construct; as iron can be made into a spade for digging or into a sword for slaying, so can mind-stuff be shaped into thought-forms that help or injure; the vibrating life of the Thinker shapes the materials around him, and according to his volitions so is his work. In that region thought and action, will and deed, are one and the same thing – spirit-matter here becomes the obedient servant of the life, adapting itself to every creative motion.

These vibrations, which shape the matter of the plane into thought-forms, give rise also from their swiftness and subtlety to the most exquisite and constantly changing colors, waves of varying shades like the rainbow hues of mother-of-pearl, etherealized and brightened to an indescribable extent, sweeping over and through every form, so that each presents a harmony of rippling, living, luminous, delicate colors, including many not ever known to earth.

Words can give no idea of the exquisite beauty and radiance shown in combinations of this subtle matter, instinct with life and motion. Every seer who has witnessed it, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, speaks in rapturous terms of its glorious beauty, and ever confesses his utter inability to describe it; words seem but to coarsen and deprave it, however deftly woven in its praise.

Thought Forms are more vitalized on the Mental Plane

Thought-forms naturally play a large part among the living creatures that function on the mental plane. They resemble those with which we are already familiar in the astral world, save that they are far more radiant and more brilliantly colored, are stronger, more lasting, and more fully vitalized. As the higher intellectual qualities become more clearly marked, these forms show very sharply defined outlines, and there is a tendency to a singular perfection of geometrical figures accompanied by an equally singular purity of luminous color. But, needless to say at the present stage of humanity, there is a vast preponderance of cloudy and irregularly shaped thoughts, the production of the ill-trained minds of the majority.

Rarely beautiful artistic thoughts are also here encountered, and it is little wonder that painters who have caught, in dreamy vision, some glimpse of their ideal, often fret against their incapacity to reproduce its glowing beauty in earth's dull pigments. These thought-forms are built out of the elemental essence of the plane, the vibrations of the thought throwing the elemental essence into a corresponding shape, and this shape having the thought as its informing life.

The First and Second Elemental Kingdoms

The elemental essence of the mental plane is formed by the Monad in the stage of its descent immediately preceding its entrance into the astral world and it constitutes the second elemental kingdom, existing on the four lower subdivisions of the mental plane. The three higher subdivisions, the "formless," are occupied by the first elemental kingdom, the elemental essence there being thrown by thought into brilliant coruscations, colored streams, and flashes of living fire, instead of into definite shapes, taking as it were its first lessons in combined action, but not yet assuming definite limitations of forms.

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Beings on the Mental Plane

On the mental plane, in both its great divisions, exist numberless Intelligences, whose lowest bodies are formed of the luminous matter and elemental essence of that plane – Shining ones who guide the processes of natural order, overlooking the hosts of lower entities before spoken of, and yielding submission in their several hierarchies to their great overlords of the seven Elements.⁸

They are, as may readily be imagined, beings of vast knowledge, of great power, and most splendid in appearance, radiant, flashing creatures, myriad-hued, like rainbows of changing supernal⁹ colors, of stateliest mien¹⁰, calm energy incarnate, embodiments of resistless strength.

The description of the great Christian Seer leaps to mind, when he wrote of a mighty angel: “A rainbow was upon his head, and his face was imperial as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire.”¹¹ “As the sound of many waters” are their voices, as echoes from the music of the spheres. They guide natural order, and rule the vast companies of the elementals of the astral world, so that their cohorts carry on ceaselessly the processes of nature with undeviating regularity and accuracy.

Helpers on the Mental Plane

On the lower mental plane are seen many Chelās at work in their mental bodies,¹² freed for a time from their physical vestures. When the body is wrapped in deep sleep the true man, the Thinker, may escape from it, and work untrammelled by its weight in these higher regions. From here he can aid and comfort his fellowmen by acting directly on their minds, suggesting helpful thoughts, putting before them noble ideas, more effectively and speedily than he can do when encased in the body. He can see their needs more clearly and therefore can supply them more perfectly, and it is his highest privilege and joy thus to minister to his struggling brothers, without their knowledge of his service or any ideas of theirs as to the strong arm that lifts their burden, or the soft voice that whispers solace in their pain.

⁸ These are the Arūpa and Rūpa Devas of the Hindus and the Buddhists, the “Lords of the heavenly and the earthly” of the Zoroastrians, the Archangels and Angels of the Christians and Mahomedans

⁹ Celestial; heavenly.

¹⁰ Bearing or manner, especially as it reveals an inner state of mind

¹¹ Revelation, x, 1

¹² Usually called Mâyâvi Rūpa, or illusory body, when arranged for independent functioning in the mental world.

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Devachan

General Description

The word Devachan is the theosophical name for heaven, and, literally translated, means the shining land, or the Land of the Gods.¹³ It is a specially guarded part of the mental plane, whence all sorrow and all evil are excluded by the action of the great spiritual Intelligences who superintend human evolution; and it is inhabited by human beings who have cast off their physical and astral bodies, and who pass into it when their stay in Kāmaloka is completed.

The Two Stages of Life in Devachan

The devachanic life consists of two stages, of which the first is passed in the four lower subdivisions of the mental plane, in which the Thinker still wears the mental body and is conditioned by it, being employed in assimilating the materials gathered by it during the earth-life from which he has just emerged. The second stage is spent in the “formless world,” the Thinker escaping from the mental body, and living in his own unencumbered life in the full measure of the self-consciousness and knowledge to which he has attained.

Time Spent in Devachan

The total length of time spent in Devachan depends upon the amount of material for the devachanic life which the soul has brought with it from its life on earth. The harvest of the fruit for consumption and assimilation in Devachan consists of all the pure thoughts and emotions generated during earth-life, all the intellectual and moral efforts and aspirations, all the memories of useful work and plans for human service – everything which is capable of being worked into mental and moral faculty, thus assisting in the evolution of the soul.

Good Thoughts are Never Lost

Not one is lost, however feeble, however fleeting; but selfish animal passions cannot enter, there being no material in which they can be expressed. Nor does all the evil in the past life, though it may largely preponderate over the good, prevent the full reaping of whatever scant harvest of good there may have been; the scantiness of the harvest may render the devachanic life very brief, but the most depraved, if he has had any faint longings after the right, any stirrings of tenderness, must have a period of devachanic life in which the seed of good may put forth its tender shoots, in which the spark of good may be gently fanned into a tiny flame.

In the Past Men Spent More time in Devachan

In the past, when men lived with their hearts largely fixed on heaven and directed their lives with a view to enjoying its bliss, the period spent in Devachan was very long, lasting sometimes for many thousands of years; at the present time, men's minds being so much more centered on earth, and so few of their thoughts comparatively being directed towards the higher life, their devachanic periods are correspondingly shortened.

¹³ Devasthan, the place of the Gods, is the Sanskrit equivalent. It is the Svarga of the Hindus; the Sukhāvati of the Buddhists; the Heaven of the Zoroastrians and Christians, and of the less materialized among the Mohammedans.

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Similarly, the time spent in the higher and lower regions of the mental plane¹⁴ respectively is proportionate to the amount of thought generated severally¹⁵ in the mental and causal bodies; All the thoughts belonging to the personal self, to the life just closed – with all its ambitions, interests, loves, hopes, and fears – all these have their fruition in the Devachan where forms are found; while those belonging to the higher mind, to the regions of abstract, impersonal thinking, have to be worked out in the “formless” devachanic region. The majority of people only just enter that lofty region to pass swiftly out again; some spend there a large portion of their devachanic existence; a few spend there almost the whole.

Leading Ideas about the Devachanic Life

Before entering into any details let us try to grasp some of the leading ideas which govern the devachanic life, for it is so different from physical life that any description of it is apt to mislead by its very strangeness. People realize so little of their mental life, even as led in the body, that when they are presented with a picture of mental life out of the body they lose all sense of reality, and feel as though they had passed into a world of dream.

Mental Life Is Far More Intense

The first thing to grasp is that mental life is far more intense, vivid, and nearer to reality than the life of the senses. Everything we see and touch and hear and taste and handle down here is two removes farther from the reality than everything we contact in Devachan. We do not even see things as they are, but the things that we see down here have two more veils of illusion enveloping them.

How Little We Know Of One Another

Our sense of reality here is an entire delusion; we know nothing of things, of people, as they are; all that we know of them are the impressions they make on our senses, and the conclusions, often erroneous, which our reason deduces from the aggregate of these impressions. Get and put side by side the ideas of a man held by his father, his closest friend, the girl who adores him, his rival in business, his deadliest enemy, and a casual acquaintance, and see how incongruous the pictures.

Each can only give the impressions made on his own mind, and how far they are from the reality of what the man is, seen by the eyes that pierce all veils and behold the whole man. We know of each of our friends the impressions they make on us, and these are strictly limited by our capacity to receive; a child may have as his father a great statesman of lofty purpose and imperial aims, but that guide of nation's destinies is to him only his merriest play fellow, his most enticing storyteller.

¹⁴ Called technically the Arūpa and Rūpa Devachan – existing on the arūpa and rūpa levels of the mental plane

¹⁵ separately, individually, or distinctly

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Illusions – Earth looks at Heaven and Heaven Looks at Earth

We live in the midst of illusions, but we have the feeling of reality, and this yields us content. In Devachan we shall also be surrounded by illusions – though, as said, two removes nearer to reality – and there also we shall have a similar feeling of reality which will yield us content.

The illusions of earth, though lessened, are not escaped from in the lower heavens, though contact is more real and more immediate. For it must never be forgotten that these heavens are part of a great evolutionary scheme, and, until man has found the real Self, his own unreality makes him subject to illusions. One thing however, which produces the feeling of reality in earth-life and of unreality when we study Devachan, is that we look at earth-life from within, under the full sway of its illusions, while we contemplate Devachan from outside, free for the time from its veil of Mâyâ.

In Devachan the process is reversed, and its inhabitants feel their own life to be the real one and look on the earth-life as full of the most patent illusions and misconceptions. On the whole, they are nearer to the truth than the physical critics of their heaven-world.

The Artist in Heaven

Next, the Thinker – being clad only in the mental body and being in the untrammelled exercise of its powers – manifests the creative nature of these powers in a way and to an extent that down here we can hardly realize. On earth a painter, a sculptor, a musician, dreams, dreams of exquisite beauty, creating their visions by the powers of the mind; but when they seek to embody them in the coarse materials of earth they fall far short of the mental creation. The marble is too resistant for perfect form, the pigments too muddy for perfect color.

In heaven, all they think, is at once reproduced in form, for the rare and subtle matter of the heaven-world is mind stuff, the medium in which the mind normally works when free from passion, and it takes shape with every mental impulse. Each man, therefore, in a very real sense, makes his own heaven, and the beauty of his surroundings is definitely increased, according to the wealth and energy of his mind. As the soul develops his powers, his heaven grows more and more subtle and exquisite; all the limitations in heaven are self-created, and heaven expands and deepens with the expansion and deepening of the soul.

The First Three Planes

The physical, astral and mental planes are “the three worlds” through which lies the pilgrimage of the soul, again and again repeated. In these three worlds revolves the wheel of human life, and souls are bound to that wheel throughout their evolution, and are carried by it to each of these worlds in turn. We are now in a position to trace a complete life-period of the soul, the aggregate of these periods making up its life, and we can also distinguish clearly the difference between personality and individuality.

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