

# The Soul's Journey through Life and Death – Part 6

Excerpts from: The Astral Plane by C.W. Leadbeater

## The Astral Plane

### Chapter 2 Scenery

FIRST of all, then, it must be understood that the astral plane has seven subdivisions, each of which has its corresponding degree of materiality and its corresponding condition of matter. Although the poverty of physical language forces us to speak of these sub-planes as higher and lower, we must not fall into the mistake of thinking of them (or indeed of the greater planes of which they are only subdivisions) as separate localities in space – as lying above one another like the shelves of a book-case or outside one another like the coats of an onion. It must be understood that the matter of each plane or sub-plane interpenetrates that of the plane or sub-plane below it, so that here at the surface of the earth all exist together in the same space, although it is true that the higher varieties of matter extend further away from the physical earth than the lower.

So when we speak of a man as rising from one plane or sub-plane to another, we do not think of him as necessarily moving in space at all, but rather as transferring his consciousness from one level to another – gradually becoming unresponsive to the vibrations of one order of matter, and beginning instead to answer to those of a higher and more refined order; so that one world with its scenery and inhabitants would seem to fade slowly away from his view, while another world of a more elevated character dawns upon him in its stead. . .

### The First Six Subdivisions of the Astral Plane

Returning to the consideration of these sub-planes, and numbering them from the highest and least material downwards, we find that they naturally fall into three classes, divisions 1, 2 and 3 forming one such class, and 4, 5 and 6 another, while the seventh and lowest of all stands alone. The difference between the matter of one of these classes and the next would be commensurable with that between a solid and a liquid, while the difference between the matter of the subdivisions of a class would rather resemble that between two kinds of solid, such as, say, steel and sand. Putting aside for the moment the seventh, we may say that divisions 4, 5 and 6 of the astral plane have for their background the physical world in which we live, and all its familiar accessories. Life on the sixth division is not unlike our ordinary life on this earth, minus the physical body and its necessities; while as it ascends through the fifth and fourth divisions it becomes less and less material, and is more and more withdrawn from our lower world and its interests.

The scenery of these lower divisions, then, is that of the earth as we know it; but in reality it is also much more: for when we look at it from this different standpoint, with the assistance of the astral senses, even purely physical objects present quite a different appearance. As has already been mentioned, one whose eyes are fully opened sees them, not as usual from one point of view, but from all sides at once – an idea in itself sufficiently confusing.

When we add to this that every particle in the interior of a solid body is as fully and clearly visible as those on the outside, it will be comprehended that under such conditions even the most familiar objects may at first be totally unrecognizable. . .

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### The Seventh Subdivision

For the seventh or lowest subdivision of the astral plane also, this physical world of ours may be said to be the background, though what is seen is only a distorted and partial view of it, since all that is light and good and beautiful seems invisible. It was thus described four thousand years ago in the Egyptian papyrus of the Scribe Ani: "What manner of place is this unto which I have come? It hath no water, it hath no air; it is deep, unfathomable; it is black as the blackest night, and men wander helplessly about therein; in it a man may not live in quietness of heart." For the unfortunate human being on that level it is indeed true that "all the earth is full of darkness and cruel habitations", but it is darkness which radiates from within himself and causes his existence to be passed in a perpetual night of evil and horror – a real hell, though, like all other hells, entirely of man's own creation.

I do not mean by this that the sub-plane is wholly imaginary – that it has no objective existence. It lies partly on the surface of the earth, and partly (perhaps mostly) *beneath* that surface, interpenetrating the solid crust. But I *do* mean that no man who lives an ordinarily pure and decent life need ever touch this eminently undesirable region, or even become conscious of its existence. If he *does* contact it, is entirely due to his own coarse and evil action, speech and thought.

### The Three Higher Subdivisions

The first, second and third subdivisions, though occupying the same space, yet give the impression of being much further removed from this physical world, and correspondingly less material. Entities inhabiting these levels lose sight of the earth and its belongings; they are usually deeply self-absorbed, and to a large extent create their own surroundings, though these are sufficiently objective to be perceptible to other entities and also to clairvoyant vision. This region is the "summer-land" of which we hear so much at spiritualistic *séances*, and those who descend from and describe it no doubt speak the truth as far as their knowledge extends.

## Chapter 3 Inhabitants, 1. Human, 2. Dead

First of all, this very word "dead" is an absurd misnomer, as most of the entities classified under this heading are as fully alive as we are ourselves – often distinctly more so; so the term must be understood simply as meaning those who are for the time unattached to a physical body. They may be subdivided into ten principal classes, as follows:

- 1. The Nirmanakaya.** (one who, having earned the right to the perpetual enjoyment of Nirvana, renounces it in order to devote himself to work for the good of mankind). This class is just mentioned in order to make the catalogue complete, but it is rarely indeed that so exalted a being manifests himself upon so low a plane as this. When for any reason connected with his sublime work he found it desirable to do so, he would probably create a temporary astral body for the purpose from the atomic matter of the plane, just as the Adept in the mind-body would do, simply because his more refined vesture would be invisible to astral sight. In order to be able to function without a moment's hesitation on any plane, he retains always within himself some atoms belonging to each, round which as a nucleus he can instantly aggregate other matter, and so provide himself with whatever vehicle he desires. Further information about the position and work of the Nirmanakaya may be found in Madame Blavatsky's *Voice of the Silence*, and in my own little book, *Invisible Helpers*.

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**2. *The Pupil awaiting reincarnation.*** It has frequently been stated in Theosophical literature that when the pupil reaches a certain stage he is able with the assistance of his Master to escape from the action of what is in ordinary cases the law of Nature which carries a human being into the heaven-world at the end of his astral life. In that heaven-world he would, in the ordinary course of events, receive the due result of the full working out of all the spiritual forces which his highest aspirations have set in motion while on earth.

As the pupil must by the hypothesis be a man of pure life and high thought, it is probable that in his case these spiritual forces will be of abnormal strength, and therefore if he enters upon this heaven-life, it is likely to be extremely long; but if instead of taking it he chooses the Path of Renunciation (thus even at his low level and in his humble way beginning to follow in the footsteps of the Great Master of Renunciation, the Lord GAUTAMA Buddha Himself), he is able to expend that reserve of force in quite another direction – to use it for the benefit of mankind, and so, infinitesimal though his offering may be, to take his tiny part in the great work of the Nirmanakayas. By taking this course he no doubt sacrifices centuries of intense bliss, but on the other hand he gains the enormous advantage of being able to continue his life of work and progress without a break.

When a pupil who has decided to do this dies, he simply steps out of his body, as he has often done before, and waits upon the astral plane until a suitable reincarnation can be arranged for him by his Master. This being a marked departure from the usual course of procedure, the permission of a very high authority has to be obtained before the attempt can be made; yet, even when this is granted, so strong is the force of natural law, that it is said the pupil must be careful to confine himself strictly to the astral level while the matter is being arranged, lest if he once, even for a moment, touched the mental plane, he might be swept as by an irresistible current into the line of normal evolution again.

In some cases, though these are rare, he is enabled to avoid the trouble of a new birth by being placed directly in an adult body whose previous tenant has no further use for it, but naturally it is not often that a suitable body is available. Far more frequently he has to wait on the astral plane, as mentioned before, until the opportunity of a fitting birth presents itself. Meanwhile, however, he is losing no time, for he is as fully himself as ever he was, and is able to go on with the work given him by his Master even more quickly and efficiently than when in the physical body, since he is no longer hampered by the possibility of fatigue. His consciousness is quite complete, and he roams at will through all the divisions of the plane with equal facility.

The pupil awaiting reincarnation is by no means one of the common objects of the astral plane, but still he may be met with occasionally, and therefore he forms one of our classes. No doubt as the evolution of humanity proceeds, and an ever-increasing proportion enters upon the Path of Holiness, this class will become more numerous.

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**3. *The Ordinary Person after death.*** Needless to say this class is millions of times larger than those of which we have spoken, and the character and condition of its members vary within extremely wide limits. Within similarly wide limits may vary also the length of their lives upon the astral plane, for while there are those who pass only a few days or hours there, others remain upon this level for many years and even centuries.<sup>1</sup>

A man who has led a good and pure life, whose strongest feelings and aspirations have been unselfish and spiritual, will have no attraction to this plane, and will, if entirely left alone, find little to keep him upon it, or to awaken him into activity even during the comparatively short period of his stay. For it must be understood that after death the true man is withdrawing into himself, and just as at the first step of that process he casts off the physical body, and almost directly afterwards the etheric double, so it is intended that he should as soon as possible cast off also the astral or desire body, and pass into the heaven-world, where alone his spiritual aspirations can bear their perfect fruit.

The noble and pure-minded man will be able to do this, for he has subdued all earthly passions during life; the force of his will has been directed into higher channels, and there is therefore but little energy of lower desire to be worked out on the astral plane. His stay there will consequently be short, and most probably he will have little more than a dreamy half-consciousness of existence until he sinks into the sleep during which his higher principles finally free themselves from the astral envelope and enter upon the blissful life of the heaven-world.

For the person who has not as yet entered upon the path of occult development, what has been described is the ideal state of affairs, but naturally it not attained by all, or even by the majority. The average man has by no means freed himself from all lower desires before death, and it takes a long period of more or less fully conscious life on the various subdivisions of the astral plane to allow the forces which he has generated to work themselves out, and thus release the ego.

Every one after death has to pass through all the subdivisions of the astral plane on his way to the heaven-world, though it must not be inferred that he will be conscious upon all of them. Precisely as it is necessary that the physical body should contain within its constitution physical matter in all its conditions, solid, liquid, gaseous, and etheric, so it is indispensable that the astral vehicle should contain particles belonging to all the corresponding subdivisions of astral matter, though the proportions may vary greatly in different cases.

### The Elemental

It must be remembered that along with the matter of his astral body a man picks up the corresponding elemental essence, and that during his life this essence is segregated from the ocean of similar matter around, and practically becomes for that time what may be described as a kind of artificial elemental. This has temporarily a definite separate existence of its own, and follows the course of its own evolution downwards into matter without any reference to (or indeed any knowledge of) the convenience or interest of the ego to whom it happens to be attached – thus causing that perpetual struggle between the will of the flesh and the will of the spirit to which religious writers so often refer.

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<sup>1</sup> Kama-Loka may last from a few minutes to a number of years . . . The rule is, that a person who dies a natural death, will remain from "a few hours to several short years," within the earth's attraction, i.e., in the Kama-Loka. <sup>(ML68)</sup>

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Yet though it is "a law of the members warring against the law of the mind", though if the man obeys it instead of controlling it his evolution will be seriously hindered, it must not be thought of as in any way evil in itself, for it is still a Law – still an outpouring of the Divine Power going on its orderly course, though that course in this instance happens to be downwards into matter instead of upwards and away from it, as ours is.

When the man passes away at death from the physical plane the disintegrating forces of Nature begin to operate upon his astral body, and this elemental thus finds his existence as a separate entity endangered. He sets to work therefore to defend himself, and to hold the astral body together as long as possible; and his method of doing this is to rearrange the matter of which it is composed in a sort of stratified series of shells, leaving that of the lowest (and therefore coarsest and grossest) sub-plane on the outside, since that will offer the greatest resistance to disintegration.

### Passing through the Subdivisions

A man has to stay upon this lowest subdivision until he has disentangled so much as is possible of his true self from the matter of that sub-plane; and when that is done his consciousness is focused in the next of these concentric shells (that formed of the matter of the sixth subdivision), or to put the same idea in other words, he passes on to the next sub-plane. We might say that when the astral body has exhausted its attractions to one level, the greater part of its grosser particles fall away, and it finds itself in affinity with a somewhat higher state of existence. Its specific gravity, as it were, is constantly decreasing, and so it steadily rises from the denser to the lighter strata, pausing only when it is exactly balanced for a time.

This is evidently the explanation of a remark frequently made by the departed who appear at *séances* to the effect that they are about to rise to a higher sphere, from which it will be impossible, or not so easy, to communicate through a medium; and it is as a matter of fact true that a person upon the highest subdivision of this plane would find it almost impossible to deal with any ordinary medium.

Thus we see that the length of a man's detention upon any level of the astral plane will be precisely in proportion to the amount of its matter which is found in his astral body, and that in turn depends upon the life he has lived, the desires he has indulged, and the class of matter which by so doing he has attracted towards him and built into himself. It is, therefore, possible for a man, by pure living and high thinking, to minimize the quantity of matter belonging to the lower astral levels which he attaches to himself, and to raise it in each case to what may be called its critical point, so that the first touch of disintegrating force should shatter its cohesion and resolve it into its original condition, leaving him free at once to pass on to the next sub-plane.

In the case of a thoroughly spiritually-minded person this condition has been attained with reference to all the subdivisions of astral matter, and the result is a practically instantaneous passage through that plane, so that he recovers consciousness for the first time in the heaven-world. As was explained before, we never think of the sub-planes as being divided from one another in space, but rather as interpenetrating one another; so that when we say that a person passes from one subdivision to another, we do not necessarily mean that he moves in space at all, but that the focus of his consciousness shifts from the outer shell to that next within it.

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The only persons who normally awake to consciousness on the lowest level of the astral plane are those whose desires are gross and brutal – drunkards, sensualists, and such like. There they remain for a period proportioned to the strength of their desires, often suffering terribly from the fact that while these earthly lusts are still as strong as ever, they now find it impossible to gratify them, except occasionally in a vicarious manner when they are able to seize upon some like-minded person, and obsess him.

The ordinarily decent man has little to detain him on that seventh sub-plane; but if his chief desires and thoughts had centered in more worldly affairs, he is likely to find himself in the sixth subdivision, still hovering about the places and persons with which he was most closely connected while on earth. The fifth and the fourth sub-planes are of similar character, except that as we rise through them mere earthly associations appear to become of less and less importance, and the departed tends more and more to mould his surroundings into agreements with the more persistent of his thoughts.

By the time we reach the third subdivision we find that this characteristic has entirely superseded the vision of the realities of the plane; for here the people are living in imaginary cities of their own – not each evolved entirely by his own thought, as in the heaven-world, but inheriting and adding to the structures erected by the thoughts of their predecessors. Here it is that the churches and schools and "dwellings in the summerland," so often described at spiritualistic *séances*, are to be found; though they often seem much less real and much less magnificent to an unprejudiced living observer than they are to their delighted creators.

The second sub-plane seems especially the habitat of the selfish or unspiritual religionist; here he wears his golden crown and worships his own grossly material representation of the particular deity of his country and time. The highest subdivision appears to be specially appropriate to those who during life have devoted themselves to materialistic but intellectual pursuits, following them not for the sake of benefiting their fellowmen thereby, as from motives of selfish ambition or for the sake of intellectual exercise. Such persons will often remain upon this level for many long years – happy enough indeed in working out their intellectual problems, but doing no good to anyone, and making but little progress on their way towards the heaven-world.

It must be clearly understood, as before explained, that the idea of space is not in any way to be associated with these sub-planes. A departed entity functioning upon any one of them might drift with equal ease from England to Australia, or wherever a passing thought might take him; but he would not be able to transfer his consciousness from that sub-plane to the next above it until the process of detachment described had been completed.

To this rule there is no kind of exception, so far as we are yet aware, although naturally a man's actions when he finds himself conscious upon any sub-plane may within certain limits either shorten or prolong his connection with it.

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But the amount of consciousness that a person has upon a given sub-plane does not invariably follow precisely the same law. Let us consider an extreme example of possible variation in order that we may grasp its method. Suppose a man who has brought over from his past incarnation tendencies requiring for their manifestation a very large amount of the matter of the seventh or lowest sub-plane, but has in his present life been fortunate enough to learn in his very earliest years the possibility and necessity of controlling these tendencies. It is scarcely probable that such a man's efforts at control should be entirely and uniformly successful; but if they were, the substitution of finer for grosser particles in his astral body would progress steadily, though slowly.

This process is at best gradual, and it might well happen that the man died before it was half completed. In that case there would undoubtedly be enough matter of the lowest sub-plane left in his astral body to ensure him no inconsiderable residence there; but it would be matter through which in this incarnation his consciousness had never been in the habit of functioning, and as it could not suddenly acquire this habit the result would be that the man would rest upon that sub-plane until his share of its matter was disintegrated but would be all the while in a condition of unconsciousness – that is to say, he would practically sleep through the period of his sojourn there, and so would be entirely unaffected by its many disagreeables.

The student of occultism, however, may make of his astral life something quite different from all this. The ordinary man, on awaking from the moment of unconsciousness which always seems to occur at death, finds himself in certain conditions which the desire-elemental has created for him by his rearrangement of the matter of the astral body. He can receive vibrations from without only through that type of matter which the elemental has left on the outside, and consequently his vision is limited to that particular sub-plane. The man accepts this limitation as part of the conditions of his new life; indeed he is quite unconscious that there is any limitation, and he supposes that what he sees is all that there is to see, since he knows nothing of the elemental or of its action.

The Theosophical student, however, understands all this, and therefore he knows that the limitation is not necessary. Knowing this he will at once set himself to resist the action of the desire-elemental, and will insist upon retaining his astral body in the same condition as during his earth-life – that is to say, with all its particles intermingled and in free motion. The consequence of this will be that he will be able to receive the vibrations from the matter of every astral sub-plane simultaneously, and so the whole astral world will be fully open to his sight. He will be able to move about in it just as freely as he could during physical sleep, and he can therefore find and communicate with any person in the astral plane, no matter to what subdivision that person may for the moment be confined.

The effort to resist the rearrangement, and restore the astral body to its former condition, is precisely similar to that which has to be made in resisting a strong desire during physical life. The elemental is afraid in his curious semi-conscious way, and he endeavours to transfer his fear to the man; so that the latter constantly finds a strong instinct creeping over him of some indescribable danger which can only be avoided by permitting the rearrangement. If, however, he steadily resists this unreasoning sense of dread by the calm assertion of his own knowledge that there is no cause for fear, he wears out in time the resistance of the elemental, just as he has resisted the prompting of desire many a time during his earthly life. Thus he becomes a living power during his astral life, able to carry on the work of helping others as he used to do during his hours of sleep.

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It may be said in passing that communication is limited on the astral plane by the knowledge of the entity, just as it is here. While a pupil able to use his mind-body can communicate his thoughts to the human entities there present more readily and rapidly than on earth, by means of mental impressions, the inhabitants of the plane are not usually able to exercise this power, but appear to be restricted by limitations similar to those that prevail on earth, though perhaps less rigid. The result of this is that they are found associating there as here, in groups drawn together by common sympathies, belief, and language.

The poetic idea of death as a universal leveller is a mere absurdity born of ignorance, for, as a matter of fact, in the vast majority of cases the loss of the physical body makes no difference whatever in the character or intellect of the person, and there are therefore as many different varieties of intelligence among those whom we usually call the dead as among the living.

The popular religious teaching of the West as to man's *post-mortem* adventures has long been so wildly inaccurate that even intelligent people are often terribly puzzled when they recover consciousness in the astral world after death. The condition in which the new arrival finds himself differs so radically from what he has been led to expect that it is no uncommon case for him to refuse at first to believe that he has passed through the portals of death at all; indeed, of so little practical value is our much-vaunted belief in the immortality of the soul that most people consider the very fact that they are still conscious an absolute proof that they have not died.

The horrible doctrine of eternal punishment, too, is responsible for a vast amount of most pitiable and entirely groundless terror among those newly arrived in this higher life. In many cases they spend long periods of acute mental suffering before they can free themselves from the fatal influence of that hideous blasphemy, and realize that the world is governed not according to the caprice of some demon who gloats over human anguish, but according to a benevolent and wonderfully patient law of evolution. Many members of the class we are considering do not really attain an intelligent appreciation of this fact of evolution at all, but drift through their astral interlude in the same aimless manner in which they have spent the physical portion of their lives. Thus after death, exactly as before it, there are the few who comprehend something of their position and know how to make the best of it, and the many who have not yet acquired that knowledge; and then, just as now, the ignorant are rarely ready to profit by the advice or example of the wise.

But of whatever grade the entity's intellect may be, it is always a fluctuating and on the whole a gradually diminishing quantity, for the lower mind of the man is being drawn in opposite directions by the higher spiritual nature which acts on it from above its level and the strong desire-forces which operate from below; and therefore it oscillates between the two attractions, with an ever increasing tendency towards the former as the forces of lower desire wear themselves out.

Here comes in one of the objections to the spiritualistic *séance*. An exceedingly ignorant or degraded man may no doubt learn much by coming into contact after his death with a circle of earnest sitters under the control of some reliable person, and so may be really helped and raised. But in the ordinary man the consciousness is steadily rising from the lower part of the nature towards the higher; and obviously it cannot be helpful to his evolution that this lower part should be reawakened from the natural and desirable unconsciousness into which it is passing, and dragged back into touch with earth in order to communicate through a medium.



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The peculiar danger of this will be seen when it is recollected that since the real man is all the while steadily withdrawing into himself, he is as time goes on less and less able to influence or guide this lower portion, which nevertheless, until the separation is complete, has the power to generate karma, and under the circumstances is evidently far more likely to add evil than good to its record.

Apart altogether from any question of development through a medium, there is another and much more frequently exercised influence which may seriously retard a disembodied entity on his way to the heaven-world, and that is the intense and uncontrolled grief of his surviving friends or relatives. It is one among many melancholy results of the terribly inaccurate and even irreligious view that we in the West have for centuries been taking of death, that we not only cause ourselves an immense amount of wholly unnecessary pain over this temporary parting from our loved ones, but we often also do serious injury to those for whom we bear so deep an affection by means of this very regret which we feel so acutely.

When our departed brother is sinking peacefully and naturally into the unconsciousness which precedes his awakening amid the glories of the heaven-world, he is too frequently aroused from his dreamy happiness into vivid remembrance of the earth-life which he has lately left, solely by the action of the passionate sorrows and desires of his friends on earth, which awaken corresponding vibrations in his own desire-body, and so cause him acute discomfort.

It would be well if those whose comrades have passed on before them would learn from these undoubted facts the duty of restraining for the sake of those friends a grief which, however natural it may be, is yet in its essence selfish. Not that occult teaching counsels forgetfulness of the dead – far from it; but it does suggest that a man's affectionate remembrance of his departed friend is a force which, if properly directed into the channel of earnest good wishes for his progress towards the heaven-world and his quiet passage through the intermediate state, might be of real value to him, whereas when wasted in mourning for him and longing to have him back again it is not only useless but harmful. It is with a true instinct that the Hindu religion prescribes its Shraddha ceremonies and the Catholic Church its prayers for the dead.

It sometimes happens, however, that the desire for communication is from the other side, and that the dead man has something which he specially desires to say to those whom he has left behind. Occasionally this message is an important one, such as, for example, an indication of the place where a missing will is concealed; but more often it seems to us quite trivial. Still, whatever it may be, if it is firmly impressed upon the mind of the dead person, it is undoubtedly desirable that he should be enabled to deliver it, as otherwise the anxiety to do so would perpetually draw his consciousness back into the earth-life, and prevent him from passing to higher spheres. In such a case a psychic who can understand him, or a medium through whom he can write or speak, is of real service to him.

Why cannot he write or speak without a medium? It may be asked. The reason is that one state of matter can ordinarily act only upon the state next below it, and, as he has now no denser matter in his organism than that of which the astral body is composed, he finds it impossible to set up vibrations in the physical substance of the air or to move the physical pencil without borrowing living matter of the intermediate order contained in the etheric double, by means of which an impulse can readily be transferred from the one plane to the other. He is unable to borrow this material from an ordinary person, because such a man's principles would be too closely linked together to be separated by any means likely to be at his command, but the very essence of mediumship is the ready

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separability of the principles, so from a medium he can draw without difficulty the matter he needs for his manifestation, whatever it may be.

When he cannot find a medium or does not understand how to use one he sometimes makes clumsy and blundering endeavours to communicate on his own account, and by the strength of his will he sets elemental forces blindly working, perhaps producing such apparently aimless manifestations as stone-throwing, bell-ringing, etc. It consequently frequently happens that a psychic or medium going to a house where such manifestations are taking place may be able to discover what the entity who produces them is attempting to say or do, and may thus put an end to the disturbance. This would not, however, invariably be the case, as these elemental forces are occasionally set in motion by entirely different causes.

**4. *The Shade.*** When the separation of the principles is complete, the astral life of the person is over, and, as before stated, he passes into the mental condition. But just as when he dies to this plane he leaves his physical body behind him, so when he dies to the astral plane he leaves a disintegrating astral body behind him. If he has purged himself from all earthly desires during life, and directed all his energies into the channels of unselfish spiritual aspiration, the higher ego will be able to draw back into itself the whole of the lower mind which he put forth into incarnation; in that case the body left behind on the astral plane will be a mere corpse like the abandoned physical body, and it will then come not into this class but into the next.

Even in the case of a man of somewhat less perfect life almost the same result may be attained if the forces of lower desire are allowed to work themselves out undisturbed in the astral plane. But the majority of mankind make but trifling and perfunctory efforts while on earth to rid themselves of the less elevated impulses of their nature, and consequently doom themselves not only to a greatly prolonged sojourn in the intermediate world, but also to what cannot be described otherwise than as a loss of a portion of the lower mind.

This is, no doubt, a material method of expressing the reflection of the higher manas in the lower, but a very fairly accurate idea of what actually takes place will be obtained by adopting the hypothesis that the manasic principle sends down a portion of itself into the lower world of physical life at each incarnation, and expects to be able to withdraw it again at the end of the life, enriched by all its varied experiences. The ordinary man, however, usually allows himself to be so pitifully enslaved by all sorts of base desires that a certain portion of this lower mind becomes closely interwoven with the desire-body, and when the separation takes place at the close of his astral life the mental principle has, as it were, to be torn apart, the degraded portion remaining within the disintegrating astral body.

This body then consists of the particles of astral matter from which the lower mind has not been able to disengage itself, which therefore retain it captive; for when the man passes into the heaven-world these clinging fragments adhere to a portion of his mind, and as it were wrench it away. The proportion of the matter of each level present in the decaying astral vehicle will therefore depend on the extent to which the mind has become inextricably entangled with the lower passions. It will be obvious that as the mind in passing from level to level is unable to free itself completely from the matter of each, the astral remnant will show the presence of each grosser kind which has succeeded in retaining its connection with it.

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Thus comes into existence the class of entity which has been called "The Shade" – an entity, be it observed, which is not in any sense the real individual at all, for *he* has passed away into the heaven-world; but nevertheless, it not only bears his exact personal appearance, but possesses his memory and all his little idiosyncrasies, and may therefore readily be mistaken for him, as indeed it frequently is at *séances*. It is not conscious of any act of impersonation, for as far as its intellect goes it must necessarily suppose itself to be the individual, but one can imagine the horror and disgust of the friends of the departed, if they could only realize that they had been deceived into accepting as their comrade a mere soulless bundle of all his lowest qualities.

The length of life of a shade varies according to the amount of the lower mind which animates it, but as this is all the while in process of fading out, its intellect is a steadily diminishing quantity, though it may possess a great deal of a certain sort of animal cunning; and even quite towards the end of its career it is still able to communicate by borrowing temporary intelligence from the medium. From its nature it is exceedingly liable to be swayed by all kinds of evil influences and, having separated from its ego, it has nothing in its constitution capable of responding to anything higher. It therefore lends itself readily to various minor purposes of some of the baser sort of black magicians. So much of mental matter as it possesses gradually disintegrates and returns to its own plane, though not to any individual mind, and thus the shade fades by almost imperceptible gradations into a member of our next class.

**5. The Shell.** This is absolutely the mere astral corpse in the later stages of its disintegration, every particle of the mind having left it. It is entirely without any kind of consciousness or intelligence and drifts passively about upon the astral currents just as a cloud might be swept in any direction by a passing breeze; but even yet it may be galvanized for a few moments into a ghastly burlesque of life if it happens to come within reach of a medium's aura. Under such circumstances it still exactly resembles its departed personality in appearance, and may even reproduce to some extent his familiar expressions or handwriting, but it does so merely by the automatic action of the cells of which it is composed, which tend under stimulation to repeat the form of action to which they are most accustomed. Whatever amount of intelligence may lie behind any such manifestation has no connection with the original man, but is lent by the medium or his "guides" for the occasion.

It is, however, more frequently temporarily vitalized in quite another manner, which will be described under the next head. It has also the quality of being still blindly responsive to such vibrations – usually of the lowest order – as were frequently set up in it during its last stage of existence as a shade, and consequently persons in whom evil desires or passions are predominant will be likely, if they attend physical *séances*, to find these intensified and as it were thrown back upon them by the unconscious shells.

There is also another variety of corpse which it is necessary to mention under this head, though it belongs to a much earlier stage of man's *post-mortem* history. It has been stated above that after the death of the physical body the astral vehicle is comparatively quickly rearranged, and the etheric double cast off – this latter body being destined to slow disintegration, precisely as is the astral shell at a later stage of the proceedings.

This etheric shell, however, does not drift aimlessly about, as does the variety with which we have hitherto been dealing; on the contrary, it remains within a few yards of the decaying physical body,

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and since it is readily visible to any one even slightly sensitive, it accounts for many of the commonly current stories of church-yard ghosts. A psychically developed person passing one of our great cemeteries may see many of these bluish-white, misty forms hovering over the graves where are laid the physical vestures which they have recently left; and as they, like their lower counterparts, are in stages of disintegration, the sight is by no means pleasant.

This also, like the other kind of shell, is entirely devoid of consciousness and intelligence; and though it may under certain circumstances be galvanized into a horrible form of temporary life, this is possible only by means of some of the most loathsome rites of one of the worst forms of black magic, about which the less said the better. It will thus be seen that in the successive stages of his progress from earth-life to the heaven-world, man casts off and leaves to slow disintegration no less than three corpses – the dense physical body, the etheric double, and the astral vehicle – all of which are by degrees resolved into their constituent elements and their matter utilized anew on their respective planes by the wonderful chemistry of Nature.

**6. *The Vitalized Shell.*** This entity ought not, strictly speaking, to be classified under the head "human" at all, since it is only its outer vesture, the passive, senseless shell, that was once an appanage of humanity; such life, intelligence, desire, and will as it may possess are those of the artificial-elemental animating it, and that, though in truth a creation of man's evil thought is not itself human. It will therefore perhaps be better to deal with it more fully under its appropriate class among the artificial entities, as its nature and genesis will be more readily comprehensible by the time that part of our subject is reached.

Let it suffice here to mention that it is always a malevolent being – a true tempting demon, whose evil influence is limited only by the extent of its power. Like the shade, it is frequently used to further the horrible purposes of the Voodoo and Obeah forms of magic. Some writers have spoken of it under the name "elementary," but as that title has at one time or another been used for almost every variety of *post-mortem* entity, it has become so vague and meaningless that it is perhaps better to avoid it.

**7. *The Suicide and the victim of sudden death.*** It will be readily understood that a man who is torn from physical life hurriedly while in full health and strength, whether by accident or suicide, finds himself upon the astral plane under conditions differing considerably from those which surround one who dies either from old age or from disease. In the latter case the hold of earthly desires upon the entity is sure to be more or less weakened, and probably the very grossest particles are already eliminated, so that the man is likely to find himself on the sixth or fifth subdivision of the astral world, or perhaps even higher; the principles have been gradually prepared for separation, and the shock is therefore not so great.

In the case of the accidental death or suicide none of these preparations have taken place, and the withdrawal of the principles from their physical encasement has been aptly compared to the tearing of the stone out of an unripe fruit; much of the grossest kind of astral matter may still cling round the personality, which will consequently be held in the seventh or lowest subdivision of the plane. This has already been described as anything but a pleasant abiding-place, yet it is by no means the same for all those who are compelled for a time to inhabit it.

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Those victims of sudden death whose earth-lives have been pure and noble have no affinity for this plane, and so the time of their sojourn upon it is passed, to quote from an early *letter*<sup>2</sup> on this subject, either in "happy ignorance and full oblivion, or in a state of quiet slumber, a sleep full of rosy dreams."

On the other hand, if men's earth-lives have been low and brutal, selfish and sensual, they will be conscious to the fullest extent in this undesirable region; and it is possible for them to develop into terribly evil entities. Inflamed with all kinds of horrible appetites which they call no longer satisfy directly now they are without a physical body, they gratify their loathsome passions vicariously through a medium or any sensitive person whom they can obsess; and they take a devilish delight in using all the arts of delusion which the astral plane puts in their power in order to lead others into the same excesses which have proved so fatal to themselves.

Quoting again from the same letter: "These are the Pisachas, the *incubi* and *succubæ* of mediæval writers – demons of thirst and gluttony, of lust and avarice, of intensified craft, wickedness, and cruelty, provoking their victims to horrible crimes, and reveling in their commission." From this class and the last are drawn the tempters – the devils of ecclesiastical literature; but their power falls utterly before purity of mind and purpose; they can do nothing with a man unless he has first encouraged in himself the vices into which they seek to draw him.

One whose psychic sight has been opened will often see crowds of these unfortunate creatures hanging round butchers' shops, public-houses, or other even more disreputable places – wherever the gross influences in which they delight are to be found, and where they encounter men and women still in the flesh who are likeminded with themselves. For such an entity as one of these to meet with a medium with whom he is in affinity is indeed a terrible misfortune; not only does it enable him to prolong enormously his dreadful astral life, but it renews for perhaps an indefinite period his power to generate evil karma, and so prepare for himself a future incarnation of the most degraded character, besides running the risk of losing a large portion of such mind-power as he may happen to possess. If he is fortunate enough *not* to meet with a sensitive through whom his passions can be vicariously gratified, the unfulfilled desires will gradually burn themselves out, and the suffering caused in the process will probably go far towards working off the evil karma of the past life.

The position of the suicide is further complicated by the fact that his rash act has diminished the power of the ego to withdraw its lower portion into itself, and therefore has exposed him to various additional dangers; but it must be remembered that the guilt of suicide differs considerably according to its circumstances, from the morally blameless act of Seneca or Socrates through all degrees down to the heinous crime of the wretch who takes his own life in order to escape from the entanglements into which his villainy has brought him; and the position after death varies accordingly.

It should be noted that this class, as well as the shades and the vitalized shells are all what may be called minor vampires; that is to say, whenever they have the opportunity they prolong their existence by draining away the vitality from human beings whom they find themselves able to influence. This is why both medium and sitters are often so weak and exhausted after a physical *séance*. A student of occultism is taught how to guard himself from their attempts, but without that knowledge it is difficult for one who puts himself in their way to avoid being more or less laid under contribution by them.

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<sup>2</sup> This is likely the Devachan Letter from Mahatma K.H.

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**8. The Vampire and Werewolf.** There remain two even more vile but happily rare possibilities to be mentioned before this part of our subject is completed, and though they differ widely in many ways we may yet perhaps group them together, since they have in common the qualities of unearthly horror and of extreme rarity – the latter arising from the fact that they are really legacies from earlier races – hideous anachronisms, appalling relics of a time when man and his surroundings were in many ways not what they are now.

We of the fifth root race ought to have evolved beyond the possibility of meeting such a ghastly fate as is indicated by either of the two headings of this sub-section, and we have so nearly done it that these creatures are commonly regarded as mere mediaeval fables; yet there *are* examples to be found occasionally even now, though chiefly in countries where there is a considerable strain of fourth-race blood, such as Russia or Hungary. The popular legends about them are probably often considerably exaggerated, but there is nevertheless a terribly serious substratum of truth beneath the eerie stories which pass from mouth to mouth among the peasantry of Eastern Europe. The general characteristics of such tales are too well known to need more than a passing reference; a fairly typical specimen of the vampire story, though it does not profess to be more than the merest fiction, is Sheridan le Fanu's *Carmilla*, while a very remarkable account of an unusual form of this creature is to be found in *Isis Unveiled* vol. 1., p. 454.

Readers of Theosophical literature will be aware that it is just possible for a man to live a life so absolutely degraded and selfish, so utterly wicked and brutal, that the whole of his lower mind may become entirely enmeshed in his desires, and finally separate from its spiritual source in the higher self. Some students even seem to have supposed that such an occurrence is quite common, and that we may meet scores of such "soulless men", as they have been called, in the street every day of our lives; but this, happily, is untrue. To attain the appalling pre-eminence in evil which thus involves the entire loss of a personality and the weakening of the developing individuality behind, a man must stifle every gleam of unselfishness or spirituality, and must have absolutely no redeeming point whatever; and when we remember how often, even in the worst of villains, there is to be found something not wholly bad, we shall realize that the abandoned personalities must always be a very small minority. Still, comparatively few though they be, they do exist, and it is from their ranks that the still rarer vampire is drawn.

The lost entity would very soon after death find himself unable to stay in the astral world, and would be irresistibly drawn in full consciousness into "his own place", the mysterious eighth sphere, there slowly to disintegrate after experiences best left undescribed. If, however, he perishes by suicide or sudden death, he may under certain circumstances, especially if he knows something of black magic, hold himself back from that appalling fate by a death in life scarcely less appalling – the ghastly existence of the vampire.

Since the eighth sphere cannot claim him until after the death of the body, he preserves it in a kind of cataleptic trance by the horrible expedient of the transfusion into it of blood drawn from other human beings by his semimaterialized astral, and thus postpones his final destiny by the commission of wholesale murder. As popular "superstition" again rightly supposes, the easiest and most effectual remedy in such a case is to exhume and burn the body, thus depriving the creature of his *point d'appui*. When the grave is opened the body usually appears quite fresh and healthy, and the coffin is not infrequently filled with blood. In countries where cremation is the custom, vampirism of this sort is naturally impossible.

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The Werewolf, though equally horrible, is the product of a somewhat different karma, and indeed ought perhaps to have found a place under the first instead of the second division of the human inhabitants of this plane, since it is always during a man's lifetime that he first manifests under this form. It invariably implies some knowledge of magical arts – sufficient at any rate to be able to project the astral body.

When a perfectly cruel and brutal man does this, there are certain circumstances under which the body may be seized upon by other astral entities and materialized, not into the human form, but into that of some wild animal – usually the wolf; and in that condition it will range the surrounding country killing other animals, and even human beings, thus satisfying not only its own craving for blood, but that of the fiends who drive it on.

In this case, as so often with ordinary materialization, any wound inflicted upon that animal form will be reproduced upon the human physical body by the extraordinary phenomenon of repercussion; though after the death of that physical body, the astral (which will probably continue to appear in the same form) will be less vulnerable. It will then, however, be also less dangerous, as unless it can find a suitable medium it will be unable to materialize fully. In such manifestations there is probably a great deal of the matter of the etheric double, and perhaps also a toll is levied upon the gaseous and liquid constituents of the physical body, as in the case of some materializations. In both cases the fluidic body appears able to pass to much greater distances from the physical than is ever otherwise possible, so far as is yet known, for a vehicle, which contains at least a certain amount of etheric matter.

It has been the fashion of this age to scoff at what are called the foolish superstitions of the ignorant peasantry; but as in the above cases, so in many others, the occult student finds on careful examination that obscure or forgotten truths of Nature lie behind what at first sight appears mere nonsense, and he learns to be cautious in rejecting as well as cautious in accepting. Intending explorers of the astral plane need have little fear of encountering the very unpleasant creatures described under this head, for, as before stated, they are even now extremely rare, and as time goes on their number will happily steadily diminish. In any case their manifestations are usually restricted to the immediate neighbourhood of their physical bodies, as might be supposed from their extremely material nature.

**9. *The Man in the Grey World.*** I have already explained that the vampire and the werewolf are anachronisms, that they belonged to the evolution of an earlier root-race. But though we have developed beyond that particular form of manifestation of it, the type of person who clings desperately to physical life because he has no certainty that there is any other still persists among us. Having been intensely material, having had no ideas, no conceptions of any sort beyond the physical during earth-life, he becomes crazy with fear when he finds himself altogether cut adrift from it.

Sometimes such men make frantic efforts to return into some sort of touch with physical life. Most do not succeed, and gradually give up the struggle; as soon as they do that, they slip off at once into the natural moment of unconsciousness and shortly awaken in the astral world. But those, whose will is strong enough to attain a partial and temporary success hold on tenaciously to at least some fragments of their etheric double, and sometimes even manage to draw particles from their physical bodies.

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We may say that the actual definition of death is the full and final separation of the etheric double from the dense body – or, to put it in other words, the breaking up of the physical body by withdrawing its etheric part from its lower part. So long as a link is maintained we may have conditions of catalepsy, trance or anaesthesia; when the link is finally broken, death has taken place.

When a man withdraws from his dense body at death, then, he takes with him the etheric part of that vehicle. But that etheric matter is not in itself a complete vehicle – only part of one. Therefore while that etheric matter still clings round him, he is neither on one plane nor the other. He has lost the organs of his physical senses, and he cannot use those of the astral body because he is still enveloped in this cloud of etheric matter. He lives for a while – fortunately only for a while – in a dim grey world of restlessness and discomfort, in which he can see clearly neither physical nor astral happenings, but catches occasional glimpses of both as through a world of heavy fog, in which he wanders, lost and helpless.

There is no reason whatever why any human being should suffer such unpleasantness at all; but he fears that in letting go that shred of consciousness he may lose all consciousness for ever – may in fact be annihilated; so he grasps desperately at this which is left to him. In time, however, he must let go, for the etheric double begins to disintegrate, and then he slips quite happily into the fuller and wider life.

Such people may sometimes be found drifting miserably and even wailingly about the astral plane, and it is one of the hardest tasks of the helper to persuade them that they have nothing to do but to forget their fear, to relax their tenseness, and to let themselves sink gently into the peace and oblivion which they need so sorely. They seem to regard such a suggestion as a ship-wrecked man far away from land might receive an order to abandon his supporting spar, and trust himself to the stormy sea.

**10. *The Black Magician or his pupil.*** This person corresponds at the other extremity of the scale to our second class of departed entities, the pupil awaiting reincarnation, but in this case, instead of obtaining permission to adopt an unusual method of progress, the man is defying the natural process of evolution by maintaining himself in astral life by magical arts – sometimes of the most horrible nature.

It would be easy to make various subdivisions of this class, according to their objects, their methods, and the possible duration of their existence on this plane, but as they are by no means fascinating objects of study, and all that in occult student wishes to know about them is how to avoid them, it will probably be more interesting to pass on to the examination of another part of our subject. It may, however, be just mentioned that every such human entity which prolongs its life thus on the astral plane beyond its natural limit invariably does so at the expense of others, and by the absorption of their life in some form or another.



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### The Elemental Essence

The Elemental Essence belonging to our own evolution. As the name "elementary" has been given indiscriminately by various writers to any or all of man's possible post-mortem conditions, so this word "elemental" has been used at different times to mean any or all non-human spirits, from the most god-like of the Devas down through every variety of nature-spirit to the formless essence which pervades the kingdoms lying behind the mineral, until after reading several books the student becomes absolutely bewildered by the contradictory statements made on the subject. For the purposes of this treatise let it be understood that elemental essence is merely a name applied during certain stages of its evolution to monadic essence, which in its turn may be defined as the outpouring of Spirit or Divine Force into matter.

We are all familiar with the idea that before this outpouring arrives at the stage of individualization at which it forms the causal body of man, it has passed through and ensouled in turn six lower phases of evolution – the animal, vegetable, mineral, and three elemental kingdoms. When energizing through those respective stages it has sometimes been called the animal, vegetable, or mineral monad – though this term is distinctly misleading, since long before it arrives at any of these kingdoms it has become not one, but many monads. The name was, however, adopted to convey the idea that, though differentiation in the monadic essence had already long ago set in, it had not yet been carried to the extent of individualization.

When this monadic essence is energizing through the three great elemental kingdoms which precede the mineral, it is called by the name of "elemental essence." Before, however, its nature and the manner in which it manifests can be understood, the method in which spirit enfolds itself in its descent into matter must be realized.

Be it remembered, then, that when spirit resting on any plane (it matters not which – let us call it plane No. 1) wills to descend to the plane next below (let us call that plane No. 2) it must enfold itself in the matter of that plane – that is to say, it must draw round itself a veil of the matter of plane No. 2. Similarly when it continues its descent to plane No. 3, it must draw round itself the matter of that plane, and we shall then have, say, an atom whose body or outer covering consists of the matter of plane No. 3. The force energizing in it – its soul, so to speak – will however not be spirit in the condition in which it was on plane No. 1, but will be that divine force plus the veil of the matter of plane No. 2. When a still further descent is made to plane No. 4, the atom becomes still more complex, for it will then have a body of No. 4 matter, ensouled by spirit already twice veiled – in the matter of planes 2 and 3. It will be seen that, since this process repeats itself for every sub-plane of each plane of the solar system, by the time the original force reaches our physical level it is so thoroughly veiled that it is small wonder men often fail to recognize it as spirit at all.

Suppose that the monadic essence has carried on this process of veiling itself down to the atomic level of the mental plane, and that, instead of descending through the various subdivisions of that plane, it plunges down directly into the astral plane, ensouling, or aggregating round it a body of atomic astral matter; such a combination would be the elemental essence of the astral plane, belonging to the third of the great elemental kingdoms – that immediately preceding the mineral. In the course of its 2,401 differentiations on the astral plane it draws to itself many and various combinations of the matter of its several sub-divisions; but these are only temporary, and it still remains essentially one kingdom, whose characteristic is monadic essence involved down to the atomic level of the mental plane only, but manifesting through the atomic matter of the astral plane.

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The two higher elemental kingdoms exist and function respectively upon the higher and the lower levels of the mental plane; but we are not at the moment concerned with them.

To speak, as we so often do, of an elemental in connection with the group we are now considering is somewhat misleading, for strictly speaking there is no such thing. What we find is a vast store of elemental essence, wonderfully sensitive to the most fleeting human thought, responding with inconceivable delicacy in an infinitesimal fraction of a second to a vibration set up in it even by an entirely unconscious exercise of human will or desire.

But the moment that by the influence of such thought or exercise of will it is moulded into a living force – into something that may correctly be described as an elemental – it at once ceases to belong to the category we are discussing, and becomes a member of the artificial class. Even then its separate existence is usually of the most evanescent character, and as soon as its impulse has worked itself out it sinks back into the undifferentiated mass of that particular subdivision of elemental essence from which it came.

It would be tedious to attempt to catalogue these subdivisions, and indeed even if a list of them were made it would be unintelligible except to the practical student who can call them up before him and compare them. Some idea of the leading lines of classification can, however, be grasped without much trouble, and may prove of interest.