

LESSON 9

THE ASTRAL BODY

(Body of Desires and Emotions)

The element of desire is an essential component in man's evolutionary process. It is the spring that compels him to action and hence to experience and learning thereof. Naturally, desire gives rise to emotion, to the extent that both elements are inextricably interwoven in man's psychological structure. As stated in Lesson 2, a clairvoyant observation of a man's astral vehicle will show in its colors and brightness his state of advancement.

Theosophy posits that, contrary to general belief, desires and emotions do not originate in our physical body but in our astral body. In order to express emotions and satisfy cravings, the latter utilizes the sense mechanisms of the former, from which we can infer that the uncontrolled desires that we experience through our senses do not come from us. The first thing we must do as students of theosophy is to learn to differentiate between the Self that we are and the vehicles this Self uses for the expression of desires, emotions and thoughts. Hence we should remind ourselves that our lack of self-esteem- a serious psychological shortcoming in today's society individual - has no real basis: the individual is not failing, only his vehicle is. The only failure attributable to the Self is his inability to control his vehicles to greater extent, but this is a task that will take him many incarnations to fully achieve. It is not an easy one, and therefore considerable time must intervene.

Given the above, some may conclude that our astral body is in fact a problem and that perhaps we could do better without it. However, an absence of astral body would represent a total absence of desires and emotions, and we cannot dispense with these because, as stated before, they represent the motivating forces which compel us to interact; and we learn and develop through the experiences brought by such interactions. The solution lies then not in the elimination of desires and emotions but in their proper control and utilization. At the start of his evolutionary journey the Ego cannot express desires, emotions or thoughts, hence Nature provides him with vehicles (bodies) which allow him to do so. But these vehicles are powerful energies and tend to function independently from the Ego. He must then undertake repeated efforts to subjugate them and turn them into docile instruments to serve his development.

A valid question has been raised in the above context: What is the purpose of learning how to manage desires and emotions which can find no expression or usefulness in the higher realms where man is supposed to dwell once his

NOTES

evolution at human level is completed? The answer is fairly simple: because it is in the very effort of learning how to control and use his vehicles effectively that he will develop character, intelligence and will-power, all essential factors to deal effectively with the life in higher spheres that follows the human stage of development.

As stated before, in the average individual the matter of his astral body ranges from gross to subtle, which is to say that it contains matter of the seven sub-levels of the astral world, all of it mixed and in continual flux. In Lesson 2 mention is made of the fact that the astral body has a kind of vague consciousness which arranges its different types of matter in concentric layers when the individual loses his physical body at death, placing the grossest on the outside and the subtlest in the core. This elemental consciousness is known in theosophy as the “astral elemental” and we will talk about it further ahead in this lesson. What is important to understand is that the state of consciousness in which the individual finds himself in the astral world after his departure from the physical will be determined by the outermost layer of his astral body. If that layer is composed of matter of the lowest astral sub-level, that will be the state and level where the individual will find himself. Hence, individuals who have gathered a considerable amount of gross astral matter in their vehicle due to their indulgences during physical life will experience an unpleasantly painful state of consciousness after death.

It is important to remember, however, that the individual **has not died**, only his physical body has. In fact he will find himself more alive than ever, as now he is no longer constrained by the heavy density of physical matter, and therefore he will feel with a greater degree of intensity anything he experiences. The man of dissipated life will be tortured by his inability to satisfy appetites he indulged in during physical life with an intensity proportional to that of his craving. This is a state which some religions have called “purgatory”, normally understood to be a place of suffering. According to theosophy, however, it is not only a place but also a state caused by the individual himself through his identification with lower vibratory rates of astral matter to which he will gravitate by affinity and magnetic attraction, and from which only he can extricate himself.

We are told that, eventually, those gross layers of matter disintegrate due to the inability of the individual to fulfill desires only the physical vehicle can satiate. In other words, the lack of fulfillment eventually kills the desires, the individual finally being able to reach the consciousness of the higher astral realms as the gross astral matter disappears from his astral vehicle.

The Astral World

References about the astral body must by necessity include the realm where this body finds expression, namely the astral world. The Astral World is the astral body of our earth, interpenetrating the earth’s physical sphere and protruding from it in a

manner
similar to

that of the astral body of man and other creatures. This astral world contains seven types of astral matter or sub-levels arranged in concentric spheres, the densest or grossest at the center due to the gravitational pull of the planet, (which influences astral matter as well). It follows then that the subtlest layer extends into outer space reaching approximately 225,000 from the crust of the earth (the orbit of the moon at perigee). These seven sub-levels comprise an upper and a lower region.

The “upper region” encompasses the three sub-levels of subtler astral matter where spiritual life, light and power find expression. Consequently, all aspects in relation to feelings and energies of a lofty and positive nature are predominant there. Higher emotions and desires, such as the arts and philanthropic endeavors, as well as higher aspirations, constitute the main characteristics of the life encountered by the individual who, once purified of his lower earthly attachments, enters this realm. As stated before, the three sub-levels encompassed by this region are situated above the surface of the earth and reaching the upper layers of the atmosphere, the stratosphere and outer space.

The fourth sub-level constitutes a kind of neutral region situated within the lower layers of the atmosphere and touching the earth’s surface. Feelings of either indifference or interest find expression here.

The lower region encompasses the three lower sub-levels which represent energies opposed in nature to the “upper region”, that is, aspects representing desires or attitudes of a lower type, such as vices, addictions, vulgar or ignoble desires, etc. Its lowest sub-level interpenetrates the physical planet, a fact that has given rise to the idea that “hell” or “purgatory” are down under the earth’s surface.

We are also told that life in the astral world manifests in four dimensions, a characteristic that makes the experience of astral life something drastically modified with respect to the three-dimensional physical life experience. Although trying to fully explain a four-dimensional type of experience is practically impossible, the closest example we may give is that of a cube which, when observed from one side, will give the viewer the impression that the far side is smaller. This, of course, is a visual illusion provoked by our angle of observation. The physical eyes have limitations concerning distance which distort the real size and shape of things. But in the astral world, we can perceive all the sides of the cube simultaneously, and thus all sides as equal. Furthermore, we shall perceive the inside of the cube with equal simultaneity. This is because physical eyes have limitations concerning distance, which distort the real size and shape of things. However, the astral body has no senses like its physical counterpart, and its ability to perceive is thus much more complete and precise. This enhanced perception is directly related to the four-dimensionality of the plane.

As one may expect, there is even a greater variety and abundance of inhabitants in the astral world than there is in the physical. One of its main residents is of course man himself whether incarnated or not. As explained in Lesson 8, during sleep the Ego leaves the physical body wrapped in his subtle vehicles - the astral and the mental -, plus the light and reflecting ethers. The light and reflecting ethers remain attached to the life and chemical ethers by that lifeline of etheric matter known as the “silver cord”, through which flows the vitality that sustains and replenishes the enemy of our physical body during sleep. (It is said that the rupture of this cord, a rather unlikely occurrence, would represent instant death for the physical body as it would be instantly severed from its vital source).

The above explains the presence of man in the astral world while still incarnated. The rest of the human population that dwells in the astral plane is constituted by those who have “died”. In some cases the “deceased” have to be told and persuaded that they have indeed left the physical plane, a realization that may take quite some time especially for people who associate the demise of their physical body with the complete annihilation of their being. They are well aware that something has changed drastically, especially as far as their perception of things and beings around them is concerned, but they remain convinced that they are still alive in their physical body. Time and the obvious differences they begin to perceive eventually give them a clear idea of what has happened and, as the certainty of their being alive in another world sets in, they begin to participate actively and consciously in the astral life.

It is said that the individual who professes no beliefs at all concerning the afterlife, convinced that he is nothing more than his physical body, will encounter an astral experience of unbearable dullness; he will feel as if he is surrounded by a fog, everything appearing gray and uneventful, and boredom will set in as his predominant feeling. Normally he will be situated in the neutral or 4th sub-level, and even if his permanence in that state is not too prolonged, it will appear to him as interminable until he finally is able to shift his consciousness to experience the higher astral sub-levels.

The average man is said to experience a much longer sojourn in the higher spheres, his astral life lasting anywhere between 20 and 40 years (as measured by physical time), and his time in the mental plane will be in excess of 700 years providing his physical death takes place at an advanced age and at the date determined by his karma. All in all, his sojourn between incarnations may last about 1,000 years, whereas the advanced individual may extend that period to two or even three thousand years before entering a new incarnation.

The conscious presence of man in the astral world after the death of his physical body is obligatory, unless he has lived a life of great purity and selflessness. His

passing
through the
astral world
will then be

made unconsciously and he will recover consciousness only in the mental world or at worst in the highest sub-level of the astral world.

The Astral Elemental

One of the most common inhabitants of the astral world are the so-called “spirits of nature. In theosophy these are called “elementals”. They are beings who find themselves still on the **involution** arc. We may recall that in our first lesson evolution was explained as a proceeding not in a straight line upwards but rather as a circle the first half of which, descending into denser and denser matter, is termed “involution” or descending arc. This method implies that all evolving entities must tread this arc until they reach the densest level (the physical) where involution ceases and is replaced by evolution proper, that is, the ascending arc. The entities existing in the involution arc possess bodies made of the most basic type of matter existing in the universe, in theosophy called “elemental essence”. There are three types of elemental essence: higher mental, lower mental and astral. The elementals who dwell in the Astral World have bodies made of astral elemental essence, hence their name.

The above is consistent with the theosophical notion that in its search for consciousness, all life must “descend” to its densest form to then emerge from it shedding density and exhibiting ever expanding consciousness. We will deal more in detail with elementals in Lesson 13, but now, reference must be made to a certain entity connected directly with the life of every individual: the astral elemental. It is, we are told, a sort of entity which becomes part of the astral body of a person, growing in power and energy as the individual lives and gives free course to his desires and emotions. The latter, expressed in an uncontrolled way, are the feeding ground for this elemental, who assumes control over the person’s astral body making it rather difficult, and sometimes impossible, to manage. Ignorant as to the existence of both this entity and his own emotional vehicle, the individual continues to live his life yielding to vices and addictions he assumes are generated by himself, but over which he seems to have no control.

The astral elemental’s life comes to an end when the physical body dies. Once this happens, the elemental feels the change and, in order to preserve its existence, arranges the matter of the astral body in concentric layers, placing the grossest on the outside. However, as stated before, the inability of the astral body to satisfy its cravings in the absence of the physical eventually weakens and disintegrates the layers of its gross astral matter one by one, finally freeing the Ego from its unpleasant visitor.

Other Inhabitants

The huge variety of inhabitant dwelling in the astral world includes entities

belonging to the devic kingdom, a

subject which will be treated in further detail in Lesson 13. There is, we are told, a class of entities in this plane which does not belong to the devic kingdom, but which originates in man. In theosophy they are known as “elementaries” and, according to C.W. Leadbeater, it comprises mainly three types: the shadow, the shell and the vitalized shell, the latter described as an artificial elemental.

The laws of Nature that rule man’s sojourn through the upper worlds after the death of his physical body mandate that the Ego’s permanence in the astral world be as temporary as his presence in both the physical and mental worlds. Once the individual has purged his astral dross in the lower levels of the plane and has subsequently experienced the beauty and power of the upper realms, he yields to the sway of very powerful forces which will draw him towards the mental world, in theosophy known as Devachan. However, for this transition to take place smoothly, the astral body must begin to disintegrate as the energies that sustain its existence weaken and disappear. Unfortunately, sometimes the passions and vices indulged in by the person in his past physical life are so firmly established in astral energy, that the Ego, irresistibly compelled to soar into the mental plane wrenches himself away from his astral body before the latter disintegrates, leaving behind part of his mental body in the process and giving rise to an entity which invariably embodies the worst qualities of the individual. The process can be equated to an unripe fruit: when the seed is pulled out, leaving some of the pulp adhered to it as a result. This entity thus retains part of the mental body of the individual along with his memory which it uses with cunning purpose. However, disconnected from the Monad and hence from everything lofty and worthy, it will not last forever. Eventually it will disintegrate, as the duration of its existence will be in direct proportion to the degree of energy of the passions which sustain its life.

The above entity is what in theosophical parlance is known as a “shadow”. These are the entities who frequent spiritual seances and attracted by the magnetism offered by the medium, sometimes impersonating the individuals being invoked during the seance. Unaware of their existence, the seance attendees remain convinced that they have contacted their deceased relatives. Nothing positive can be derived from this type of activity, and students are advised to refrain from it. In fact, it is a dangerous practice since the shadow will exact vital energy from the medium and others present at the seance in order to perpetuate its existence.

The “astral shell” is in fact the empty astral corpse of a human being in its last stages of decomposition, every particle of mental matter having departed from it. As such, it possesses no consciousness nor intelligence, and passively floats over the astral currents. However, it can be temporarily animated by a good medium and impersonate a deceased person.

The “vitalized shell” can be considered an artificial elemental, an entity created by man through that which in theosophy is known as a “thought form”(see Lesson 11).

This entity constitutes perhaps the largest class amongst astral beings. Thought forms of course may take many different shapes which are determined by the type of thought emitted by an individual and the duration of their existence is proportional to the intensity and persistence with which the thought is projected. In the case of the vitalized shell, the thought animating it is almost invariably a malevolent one oriented to injure another person. The reprehensible practices of “voodoo” and “obeah”, prevalent in some areas, utilize this type of elementary to achieve their sinister purposes and their power can even kill the individual they are directed against.

We are told that the karmic effects for those who indulge in such practices can be counted amongst the most drastic of that retributive law, essentially because they are in direct opposition to the universal Law of Love. It is also said, that black magicians and their pupils who dwell in the astral plane are able to prolong their existence by means of practices of the most horrible nature, and pay for it an equally horrible price as well.

The Occult Pupil

When a human being has reached a certain degree of development and is hence in the position of joining the effort of those exalted Beings who work for the evolution of mankind and its progress, he is asked whether he would consent to renounce his well earned devachanic period (i.e., his permanence on the mental plane or heaven) prior to his next incarnation and thus incarnate much faster in order to perform occult work. This represents a great sacrifice, but it is also a great honor which will have a positive effect on the student’s individual progress. If he accepts, authorization must be issued from a Higher Authority (generally the Chief of the Masters, known as the Mahachohan) before this can be effectuated, and once it is given, the student will dwell for a brief time in the astral plane before his next incarnation.

Animals

We are told that when animals die they have a short existence in the astral plane. Animals who are sacrificed daily to supply red meat for world-wide markets arrive in the astral world in a state of terror and hatred against their executors which adds a low vibratory rate to the plane, reinforcing the negative energies of its lower sub-levels. And since it is axiomatic that all that is astral reflects on the physical world, the negative vibration impinges on the minds and emotions of incarnated man, conditioning his thoughts and actions. It is then not unrealistic to affirm that once mankind renounces the ingestion of meat and the concomitant cruelties performed to make it available, he will be less disposed to violence and animal passions, since it is reasonable to state that, to considerable extent, we are what we eat.

The student
is hence
advised to

seriously consider abstaining from meat not only for moral or spiritual reasons, but because the effects of vegetarianism on the physical body have proven to be salutary, ensuring a long life with better prospects of good health. How can one who aspires to the spiritual Path find it acceptable to indulge in killing and cruelty, especially considering that the planet produces more than enough food substances with the necessary proteins and other nutriment for an effective and healthy diet.

After-death state on the Astral World

It is reasonable to assume that the state in which those who have died find themselves in the astral world varies widely, and will be in direct proportion to their individual vibratory situation and magnetism. There are no two persons in equal standing even if they are in a somewhat similar state. Hence we can conclude that our astral experience will not depend on some kind of angry God sending us there in punishment for our sins, but on the vibratory rate which we have set for ourselves individually through our thoughts and actions in physical life. In other words, we will be attracted by magnetic affinity to that sub-level of the astral world which is in sympathy with our own emotions and desires. If these have been of the lower sort, our consciousness will manifest in the lower sub-levels; if they have been loftier, we will experience life only in the higher sub-levels.

Mention should be made of the fact that, after death, people continue to be exactly what they were when in their physical bodies. The individual has merely shed a vesture, and there is no reason to assume that his nature or his evolutionary state will abruptly change because of it. If he was a generous person, he will continue to be that, or he will continue to be selfish if that was his way, the same principle applying to all his other personal characteristics.

It is said that the type of death experienced by the individual is another factor in the conditions of his astral life, hence it may be useful to briefly mention what happens under certain circumstances. Upon recovering his consciousness, the individual will be in an understandable state of confusion from which he will gradually emerge as his astral consciousness focuses on the astral sub-level corresponding to his own vibratory state. His ability to perceive the plane and experience the life in it depends largely, we are told, on his age as a soul. The primitive man, a new soul, will enjoy only a vague astral consciousness and practically no devachanic (mental plane) experience to speak of due to his reduced capacity to respond to life in subtle matter. Gradually, as his incarnations follow one after the other, his consciousness will expand allowing him to perceive in a clearer fashion and for a longer time the planes that follow the physical. But it should be made clear that the fact that a soul is old by no means indicates that it is also pure and good; there are old souls who have gone on the “left path” and

continue
live lives
which are
marked by

selfishness, vice and cruelty. They will experience the lower astral levels in the keenest way, the sharpness of their suffering increasing in proportion to the intensity of their vices and passions.

Suicides and victims of accidents

We are told that these two types are bound to experience a difficult astral life. If the victim of a sudden accident was someone who lived a clean and decent life, he will remain in an unconscious state until the time his normal death occurs in accordance with his karma. He will then awaken on the upper levels of the astral plane with all the consciousness he has been able to develop to that point, his astral sojourn being a rather pleasant one.

The vicious, crude individual who disincarnates in full flush of his uncontrolled passions and addictions will, by contrast, awaken in the lower astral levels attracted by their low magnetism in sympathy with his own. His inability to satisfy cravings he was used to in physical life will accord him intense suffering. In such individuals, the connection between their astral body and their etheric double becomes quite strong, vivifying the astral vehicle and increasing its capacity to feel the pain.

The suicidal man confronts a similar situation, adding to it the great karmic debt incurred when he killed his own physical body. There are, however, varying levels of responsibility in that action ranging between those who lose their control momentarily (in legal terms known as “temporary insanity”, the victims of an unbearably painful situation), and those who with calm deliberation take their physical life either to avoid confronting their problems or simply because of boredom. The law of karma, in its invariable equanimity, will give one and the other the exact measure of consequence as dictated by the circumstances which determined the suicidal act.

The karmic effects of suicide normally manifest in a future life, where the Ego finds himself incarnated in a severely handicapped body or with a defective brain, thus finding his advancement strongly curtailed by the inadequacy of his new vehicle. Through this, he learns two important lessons: a) the sacredness of all life, including that of his own body, and b) the necessity to develop moral courage and strength to cope with the vicissitudes of physical life, understanding that it is precisely through such suffering that spiritual consciousness, wisdom and compassion develop.

The Sub-levels of the Astral World

What follows is a description of the seven sub-levels of the astral world, starting from the lowest or densest:

astral sub-
level, Sub

Sub-level 7 represents the lowest of the astral sub-levels, and it interpenetrates the physical sphere of the earth, a fact that has given rise to the western religious notion that “hell” or “purgatory” are “down” under the ground. Here dwell the worst criminals, the fiercely selfish and materialistic, individuals distinguished by their cruelty and crude passions. This is very dense, gross astral matter vibrating in tune with desires and emotions of the lowest kind.

Sub-level 6, is still inside but closer to and above the physical surface of the planet, offering an astral existence which appears sad and disoriented. This is still very gross astral matter but in a lesser measure than sub-level 7. Its dwellers are people without the meanness of those in the latter, but who are essentially egocentric and still fiercely attached to their possessions or interests on earth. Astral entities who attend spiritualistic seances trying to impersonate departed relatives of those who delve in that practice, are also amongst the inhabitants of this sub-level.

Sub-level 5, interpenetrates the earth’s atmospheric layers, touching the surface as well; it is inhabited by departed individuals who are still attached to earthly considerations as well as by a broad range of elementals. Mothers who have disincarnated abruptly due to accident or sudden illness such as a heart attack, are found here in a state of profound concern when they have left behind small children whose welfare may be in jeopardy. Some may remain for a long time in this sub-level trying to determine the fate of their children, delaying their normal astral progress until they are finally given assurances that the children are safe and properly taken care of.

Sub-level 4, represents astral matter of lesser density than the aforementioned three sub-levels, interpenetrating the upper part of the earth’s atmosphere. It constitutes a kind of neutral zone inhabited by those individuals who, although dispossessed of meanness or lower vices, never gave a thought to the afterlife, devoting their physical existence only to the pursuance of material goals and atheistic feelings, firmly convinced that they are only their physical body and that there is no life after death at all.

Sub-level 3, is composed of luminous, subtle astral matter occupying outer space around the physical planet and beyond its atmospheric layers, Here dwell those who have arrived purified by the experience of the lower levels or those whose physical life was not soiled by earthly passions and are pure by nature.

Sub-level 2, encompasses astral matter of even greater subtlety and beauty. Its dwellers cannot express emotions and desires which are not of the highest type.

Sub-level 1, reaches the orbit of the moon and represents the highest astral sub-level, the antechamber of the mental plane. Emotions and desires find their highest expression in this region of the inexpressible light and color. The best artistic endeavor and the noblest feelings of love and concern for others are the main

features of
its

inhabitants. From here, the Ego “ascends” to the mental plane, and his astral sojourn is concluded.

Communication with Dead Persons

Communication between people still in physical life and those who have crossed into the astral world is possible, but not recommendable. Nature, in its wisdom, has established complete separation between the inhabitants of the physical and the astral spheres essentially for the protection of both. Spiritualistic seances held with an intention to contact the deceased represent therefore a violation of natural law, especially when such desire for contact is borne in personal considerations. There are valid reasons to keep both worlds separate, and they have to do with our advancement and the effective methods to ensure it. Such contacts do not favor in the least our individual advancement; quite the contrary they may set it back! This is the reason why the Masters of the Wisdom (see Lesson 6) oppose this practice.

Contacting those who have crossed over is, in addition, quite difficult. It may be possible to contact someone on the 4th sub-level, for instance, due to his/her proximity with the physical sphere of activity. But if the person is not in that level, he is bound to be impersonated by an elementary that may be passing by the vicinity where the seance is being held, attracted by the medium’s magnetism. It is, we are told, quite impossible to contact persons who have reached the upper sub-levels, regardless of the ability and power of the medium.

Conclusions

From the above, it may be concluded that individuals with strong physical attachments will experience a more prolonged astral sojourn on the lower sub-levels of the astral plane, since they are bound to encounter difficulties in eliminating all that gross astral matter from their astral vehicle. Eventually, however, even the worst will do so, achieving the necessary cleanliness and purity to move to the higher sub-levels.

The advanced disciple may, with prior authorization from a Higher Source, renounce his devachanic period (if he was offered the opportunity by one of the Masters) in order to incarnate quickly and accomplish a certain work. But this is an entirely voluntary endeavor, and the sacrifice it represents will accord the individual a higher measure of spiritual advancement as a result. However, for the latter to take place, such sacrifices must be made with a view to help others and not thinking of one’s own advancement.

Among the highest visitors of the astral plane are found certain Entities who actually materialize an astral vehicle for the occasion. They are known as the Nirmanakayas, and They form part of the vast angelic host dwelling in the higher planes.

As one may expect, the duration of the Ego's permanence on the astral world is proportional to the intensity of his emotions and desires. The ascetic yogi who lives in the mountains and has practically killed all desire for earthly things, will pass quickly and unconsciously through the lower astral levels after his death, his consciousness awakening sometimes only at the mental level. By contrast the mundane individual intensely attached to mundane concerns will have to endure a long astral sojourn through the lower regions. Once more it bears repetition that this does not happen as a result of punishment from an outer authority, some kind of personal deity who punishes us for our sins, but merely as a result of the vibratory situation we have established for ourselves through our habits and actions, which in turn determines our attractions. The lower astral regions represent matter in sympathy with terrestrial vices and passions and a prolonged attachment to these will inevitably and by affinity bring us in contact with them. Our choice is then clear: either we get rid of our negative habits voluntarily during physical life, or we will do so obligatorily and painfully during astral life where our inability to indulge in them will force our abstinence.

We are told that the duration of astral life ranges between 20 and 40 years for the average individual (as measured by physical time), but these numbers may vary widely depending on the state of the individual at disincarnation. Clearly, our perception of time in the astral world will differ considerably from that of the physical, and the passing of hours will be experienced in accordance with the type of experiences we may encounter. Even in physical life this is true to a good extent: if we are having a good time, the hours seem to fly; quite the opposite happens when we face a difficult or unpleasant situation. For example, the three hours of a very entertaining movie may seem too short, whereas a 20 minute visit to the dentist may seem like three hours.

The suffering imposed by the lower astral experience is purgatorial in nature, cleansing the individual of his earthly passions and preparing him for his entering the mental plane. However, it should be made clear that the tendency to fall into those passions again will remain in his seed atom **and will manifest again in his next incarnation**. In order to eliminate all his lower tendencies in a definite way, cosmic law requires that this must be done by the individual through his own determination and **while still in the physical world**. Once this is achieved, those tendencies will never bother him again. He has gained victory in his greatest battle, the one against his lower nature.

The Nature of Astral Life

Life on the astral plane is of a subjective nature, hence very difficult to describe objectively, and is drastically different from physical, sensory life. Having no senses, the astral body conveys a completely different perception of life to the

individual.
This is, as

indicated in Lesson 2, the “unobstructed universe”, entirely dynamic in nature and where, by virtue of such nature nothing is ever still. Things do not have the fixity observed in the physical world, and accuracy of observation depends largely on the capacity of the observer. The subtlety of astral matter quickly responds to thoughts expressed to materialize any object, but if the thought is not sufficiently sustained, the object in question will disappear with equal rapidity.

Our astral life concludes when, purified from his lower desires and having experienced the higher regions of the astral plane, the Ego enters the mental plane as his astral body disintegrates. The motivational element provided by desire is now replaced by the energies impinging over the Ego from the Buddhic plane, a much purer and higher motivational factor slowly developing in man.

Of the four physical kingdoms at present existing on the planet only two possess an active astral body: the animal and the human. Minerals and vegetables have an astral double who is under the influence of the astral body of the planet, this being the main reason why neither of the two are able to experience desire or emotion to the extent of the two former kingdoms.

Questions for Consideration

1. What is the object of having an astral body?
2. Describe the astral body and its structure.
3. How many sub-levels does the astral world have?
5. What is an elemental?
6. What is an elementary?
7. Describe the type of life and consciousness which characterizes the astral world.
8. What happens when astral life concludes?

Supplementary Reading

- The Astral Plane, by C.W. Leadbeater
- The Astral Body, by A.E. Powell
- Space, Time and Self, by Norman E. Pearson