

# Exploring our true nature

*Theosophy as the Awakening Journey  
of our Spiritual Potential*





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of our Spiritual Potential*

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# Introduction

## **The challenges we are facing and the Wisdom Tradition**

We are living in an increasingly complex and challenging world, for humanity as a whole, and for us individually. Science, global economy and modern communication make us increasingly aware of the magnitude and cohesion of the world and the cosmos. Remarkably this has not made us more humane, but instead we consider ourselves increasingly important, and see ourselves as the centre of the universe. For many, this resulted in an egocentric and materialistic attitude of life, and thus in inner and outer conflicts. Peace can only emerge if we are prepared to change, based on our inner wisdom.

***'We must become the change we want to see in the world'.***

Mahatma Gandhi

Our materialistic society tends to draw us away from what we really are, as spiritual human beings. The ancient wisdom tradition, which is of all times and all people, has always been involved with the problems of humanity and its relationship with creation. A deep connection with all aspects of creation opens a holistic perspective to understand and face the challenges of our time, and work together in harmony. This process of awareness is at the heart of the work of esoteric organizations, each of which has interpreted and worked it out in their own way. The Theosophical Society (TS) considers itself as an exponent of this wisdom tradition. One of the underlying aims of the TS is to stimulate the spiritual intuition, also called wisdom, of humankind.

## **The Wisdom Tradition: fundamental unity of all that exists**

The fundamental unity of existence is the most important principle of the wisdom tradition. Creation is fundamentally One, not a connection of separate things. This has two equal aspects, mind and matter. The one does not exist without the other. There is nothing outside this unity. Thus, behind the multiple world of our experiences lies a single Reality. All things have come forth from that One, therefore they are also in their true nature, that One. The infinite phenomena of the manifested universe, from the highest to the lowest, from the

largest to the most insignificant, are that One. The One is and remains One, in all diversity.

### **Our true nature is divine**

So, the True Nature of you and me is also the One, the Supreme. It is our mission to become aware of our True Nature, of this Divine Core. We share this Core with all that exists. We are part of a Universal Kinship with all our fellow beings. Our path to awareness of our True Nature is an inner transformative process. If we can detach ourselves from the identification with our personality, with our emotions, our fears, desires and experiences, space is created. In that space we experience that we are essentially one with the other, the others; that we are “We”.

### **An introduction of subjects related to our own spiritual life**

Theosophical investigators studied an infinite range of subjects, based on their vision of the eternal wisdom. The writers of this book particularly selected those subjects which have impact on our daily life. These theosophical ideas have been described in short chapters. The aim of this book is to encourage further enquiry. Chapters therefore end with questions for consideration.

### **Words give the direction to the moon, are not the moon itself.**

Theosophy, divine wisdom, deals with levels of consciousness which are hard to describe in words, hard to grasp by daily intellect. Therefore, symbol and myth were used in the past. These also had the advantage that hidden knowledge was not accessible for non-initiates. Theosophical literature can only give directions. Your spiritual intuition is required to get to the bottom of the unity of life, after a process of study, meditation and contemplation.

### **Study and the practice in daily life**

Theosophical literature are efforts of writers to describe universal laws and visions within the context of time and their own experiences on the path.

The reader is encouraged to give this a place in your own life. There is nothing as practical as a good, clear concept. These and daily life are interconnected, like a map. Without practice, study is like a road which is not followed. The road without a map is a journey without direction. One needs knowledge to be able to test and validate spiritual experiences. Every journey starts with a first step. It is less important how far one has travelled on this journey, but more important to begin.

### **Embracing new ideas**

This book may offer you new ideas, some of which may seem strange, contradictory to traditional thought, which generally puts the material world central. Other ideas may result in some recognition. In both cases, it is recommended to observe your own reactions. The recognition may lead to 'thought' encapsulating the idea, which prevents deeper search on finer levels of understanding. On the other hand, new ideas can easily be rejected. Both reactions give the same result.

It may be helpful to visualise new ideas as droplets onto water or as landing on a small dish. Give it space, some time, let it play for some time on the background of your mind. Gradually new questions emerge: is it reasonable, is it wholesome, does this reflect another dimension than your daily thoughts? Does it make your mind free, or does it limit it? This process, as the unfolding of the lotus flower, is more important than the result. Nevertheless, try to give these new ideas a serious chance, as they are based on the age-old wisdom tradition.

### **Gender neutral language**

While the first object of the TS states "To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour", in the past the word 'man' and 'brotherhood' was used extensively in literature and was meant generically and so inclusive of both men and women. In this booklet we have amended language to be gender neutral generally. In the case of quotes, we have left these in original format, though the meaning

is generic and inclusive of both men and women. Anyhow, at soul level all such distinction vanishes.

### **Use of Sanskrit words**

The ancient language of Sanskrit is used by students and teachers of the ancient wisdom tradition across the world because one word in Sanskrit sometimes signifies a whole paragraph, or a whole sentence at least, and in a way which can be more penetrating than our English phraseology. In this introductory booklet we use Sanskrit only when it can help with understanding. The reader unfamiliar with these terms italicised in the script, is referred to the Glossary.

### **This book invites further exploration**

This book has been written by several members of the Theosophical Society. The writers hope the book may result in a sense of wonder, the teacher of true wisdom.

### **Truth cannot be organised**

*God and the devil were walking in the street when they came across an exalted person calling: "I found Truth, I found Truth!"*

*So God says to the devil: "I am sorry for you, but this one is mine."*

*Says the devil: "But tomorrow they start organising it, and then they are mine again!"*

Joke attributed to J. Krisnamurti

# 2

## A few basic theosophical propositions

This book refers to theosophical or esoteric teachings. Use of the word 'teachings' seems contradictory to the fact that there are no dogmas, that the searcher needs to follow his/her own path. In the Theosophical Society the word teaching does not mean that one has to learn or accept this, but is offered for consideration, so that the searcher can learn from what others have gleaned. Nevertheless, one can speak about a common basis. The three propositions from *The Secret Doctrine*, written by madame H.P. Blavatsky (HPB) in 1888, abstract as they may seem, are often considered as fundamental for theosophical search. These include the cohesion of the creative forces and universal laws (so, without a personalised God), while all souls – a spark of the divine – make a cyclical pilgrimage on a journey towards deeper insight.

### ***Fundamentals from the Prologue of The Secret Doctrine***

1. *There is an omnipresent, eternal, boundless and unchanging principle, about which any speculation is impossible. It is beyond human comprehension and could only be reduced by human expressions or comparisons. It is beyond the realm and reach of thought. This absolute BEING precedes creation and is symbolized by two aspects, absolute space and absolute movement.*
2. *The universe as a whole is eternal, like a boundless realm. It is periodically the scene of countless universes that manifest and disappear incessantly. This concerns the general validity of the law of periodicity, of ebb and flow, day and night, life and death, of rise and fall.*
3. *All souls are fundamentally equal to the universal Over-Soul, which is itself an aspect of the unknown root, the immutable principle. All souls are a spark of the over-soul and go on a mandatory pilgrimage through the cycle of incarnations (or necessity), in accordance with cyclical and karmic law, during the whole term.*

The Secret Doctrine, H. P. Blavatsky, Prologue pages 43 - 47 (summarized).

## **HPB's advice: four basic ideas for the study of The Secret Doctrine**

In addition, HPB advises to always keep the following ideas in mind for each topic, which should be the basis of further considerations:

- 1. The fundamental unity of all existence.** Existence is one, not a collection of things linked together. Fundamentally there is One Being, with two aspects, spirit or consciousness on the one hand, and substance on the other, the vehicle of consciousness. This Being is the Absolute in its very first manifestation. Because it is absolute, there is nothing outside. It is All-Being. It is indivisible, otherwise it would not be absolute. If a part could be separated from it, the remaining part would no longer be absolute, because there would be a direct comparison between the remaining and the separated part. Comparison is incompatible with any idea of absoluteness. Therefore, it is clear that this fundamental One Existence or Absolute Being must be Reality in every form there is.
- 2. There is no dead matter.** Every single atom is alive. There is no other way, since every atom in itself is fundamentally absolute being. Therefore, there is no such thing as "spaces" of ether or akasha, or whatever you want to call it, in which angels and elementals roam like trout in water. Every atom of matter, in whatever field, is a life in itself.
- 3. Man is the microcosm** (a cosmos in miniature). Since he is, all the hierarchies of heaven exist in him. But in truth there is neither macrocosm nor microcosm, but one Existence. Large and small exist only as representations of limited consciousness.
- 4. The Great Hermetic Axiom.** This law lists and summarizes all the others:  
As is the Inner, so is the Outer  
As is the Great, so is the Small  
so it is Above, so it is Below  
There is but One Life and Law  
And he that worketh it is One  
Nothing is Inner, nothing is Outer  
Nothing is Great, nothing is Small  
Nothing is High, nothing is Low  
In the Divine Economy.

Source:  
Memories of R. Bowen,  
summarized

*“A necessary prerequisite for the occult path is the abandonment of the idea that we are individuals separate from the whole. Before we venture to even take the first step, we must undergo an inner transformation by which we realize that we are but local expressions of the One-being. Hence, the need for a universal perspective from the very beginning, which provides a firm moral basis that no common social or religious argument can offer.”*

*Pablo Sender, Approaching The Secret Doctrine, page 206.*

### Questions for consideration

1. Note how HPB described the divine principle in both first statements, avoiding that it can easily be captured by thought. How would you describe Deity, God if you like? Read both sections carefully again, give it some time for consideration. As explained in the previous chapter, observe your response to these statements. Both grasping it, trying to understand it, or rejecting it, avoids a process of open enquiry. Through this you may get a deeper understanding, stimulating the awakening of a higher perception of the Divine in and around us. What is different from your initial description? Would you like to change your description?
2. The divine is ultimately cause of creation. This creative energy is still there. Go back to when you created something special, for instance a piece of art, a creative process in a team. What was your experience then? Was the experience joyful, curious, creating space in your consciousness, or something else?
3. Have you ever looked at yourself as being a spark of the divine? What impact does that have on you?
4. We are considered to be on a pilgrimage. Most of the time pilgrimages have a certain goal. Did you ever consider what would be your goal on your current pilgrimage?
5. All hierarchies of heaven, and processes of creation, exist in us. This may be an overwhelming thought. Give it some time to wonder, to ponder, to see what it could mean to your daily life.

# 3 You are more than you think; seven states of human constitution

Within the Theosophical Society (TS) a sevenfold model is used for the different aspects of consciousness and bodies, which is helpful and clarifying. A few Sanskrit words are used here to help with understanding since western words, such as soul and spirit, are not used in a uniform way, or have outdated connotations, and therefore can cause a lot of confusion.

In the following quote H.P. Blavatsky (1831-1891) refers to seven wave-lengths. Wave lengths have two different aspects, movement and space, or in this case mind (consciousness) and matter (vehicles).

*“Thus, man functions on, and responds to, seven distinct yet correlated wave-lengths, each of which corresponds to a specific plane or world of being while the One Cosmic Life-Consciousness, binding and permeating everything flows through all of them. [...] While man is built of ‘materials’ or ‘stuffs’ drawn from the Cosmic reservoir, yet he is not a mere bundle of substances and energies merely gathered together. Man is an intimately correlated series of consciousness-centres, and these are termed Monads. The essential or supreme Spiritual Divine Monad is our ultimate source or root. It is continuously pouring forth streams of intelligence and life substance which produce by their interacting energies the various ‘knots’ or foci of consciousness that are its children-monads, as it were.”*

H.P. Blavatsky, Esoteric instruction No I CW XII: 530-531



See page 14 and 15

## The sevenfold constitution of the human being.

Theosophical terms (Sanskrit)		English words
<i>âtman</i>		Spirit
<i>buddhi</i>		Spiritual Soul/ Wisdom
<i>manas</i>	higher <i>manas</i>	Higher Self / Wisdom mind
	lower <i>manas</i>	Lower Self / Desire mind
<i>kāma</i>		Emotions
<i>prāṇa</i>		Vitality
<i>liṅga śarīra</i>		Etheric double
<i>sthūla śarīra</i>		Physical body

In the context of this booklet, we will mainly explore the aspects of our spirit, soul, thought and emotions, respectively *âtman*, *buddhi*, *manas* and *kāma*. Through quiet self-observation one can experience and recognise a number of these aspects. If we are emotional, can we think properly? When we are very quiet, observing beauty, for instance in nature, we can be touched, inspired, which is beyond thought, *manas*. A clear understanding of these is required to be able to explore and understand the process between death and life, as well as karma and reincarnation.

### **Ātman (Sanskrit, *âtman*: Self). The universal spirit in nature and in us.**

**Ātman** is not an individual part of us, but the inseparable ray of the divine essence, the essence with which everything created is fundamentally one (the “Father in secret” of Jesus). Through this divine spark we are connected to each other in the depths of our being. The root of the word *âtman*, can be found in western languages as breath (in the German language as the verb *atmen*, *der Atem* as noun) and gives Adam in the biblical text a deeper content: “Then the LORD God sculpted man out of dust that he took from the earth, and He breathed the breath of life into his nose, thus man became a living being”. (Genesis 2.7).

**Aspects:** (factual) will, source of courage, determination, strength, endurance, discipline.

**Buddhi (Sanskrit, bud: to awaken, perceiving, learning). Spiritual soul.**

The root of the word, bud, to awaken, indicates that the wisdom level is concerned with awakening to the truth, or recognizing the truth in something, as opposed to believing, guessing, hypothesizing, etcetera. It is comparable with the Greek word gnosis. Buddhi transforms the high energies from âtman to manas through inspiration, transcending the level of reality as known by thought. Words can therefore only be signposts in an attempt to appeal to intuition and thus to indicate the concept. The influence of buddhi can be stimulated through symbolic, mythical thinking, reading spiritual texts, looking at art, experiencing beauty, listening with the heart. As soon as the mind wants to 'take' these experiences, analyze them, it is gone.

**Buddhi** is an ability that is dormant in most people and only fully at work among the great spiritual leaders of humanity. In those cases buddhi can connect directly with others, from mind to spirit rather than through words or sight. This brings with it complete understanding, and therefore perfect empathy and compassion. Buddhi is sometimes called 'the Observer'.

**Aspects:** spiritual wisdom, spiritual intuition, insight, compassion, cosmic consciousness, inner peace. The source of our conscience, duty, space, universal intelligence, pure reason, impersonal, divine love, experience of unity. Characteristic of buddhi is openness, space, freedom, creativity. The mind is then liberating, gives way to space, allowing the spiritual intuition to express itself. This is the bliss that arises from direct perception, the experience of the unity of all existence.

Intuition, a frequently used word, needs an explanation here. Spiritual intuition (buddhi) has nothing to do with a hunch, ESP or extrasensory perceptions, which are more at the level of the astral. It has to do with insight, directly perceiving what transcends rational thinking.

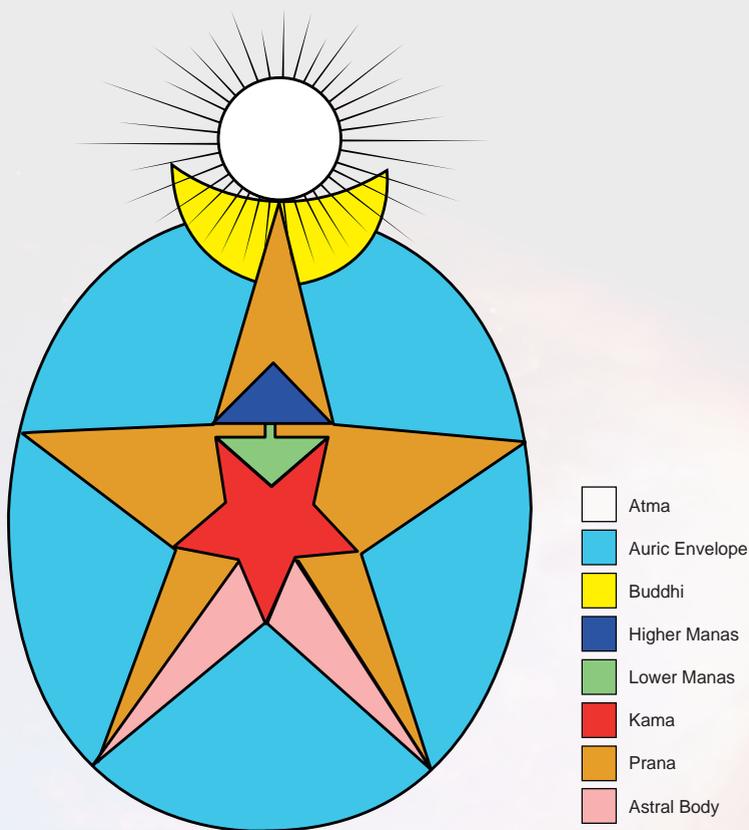
**Manas:** (Sanskrit, manas: mind, thought). The human soul, as opposed to the spiritual soul of buddhi.

The human mind, mental activity, conscious attention.

Manas is self-consciousness, which connects the spiritual with the physical.

The root of the word manas can be found in western languages; such as the gender-neutral connotation of the German and English word man. It shows that manas is the human aspect of our consciousness.

*Continues on page 16*



This plate was part of the Esoteric Instructions, published by H.P. Blavatsky (HPB) for her Esoteric School (1889), as a symbolic illustration of

**the different aspects of the human constitution.**

HPB often tried to make clear that any list or figure representing the human constitution, its levels of consciousness and vehicles, is an illusion.

It may be helpful, but can also become a mental obstacle for the development of spiritual intuition, when considered as absolute.

## Explanations with the diagram

**Ātman**; the “radiant spiritual sun” is actually not a human ‘principle’, as it is omnipresent. There is no individual Ātman. It is therefore visualised outside of the blue Auric Egg.

**Buddhi**; the yellow half-moon, receives the radiation, or serves as the vehicle of Ātman.

**Higher manas**; is represented as a triangle pointing upwards, coloured indigo-blue.

**Lower manas**, represented by a triangle pointing downwards, is coloured green.

The higher *manas* is connected with the lower *manas* through a thin connection.

This is the Antahkarana, the imaginary narrow bridge, or the path, which serves as a link between the higher and the human aspects of *manas*.

**Kama**; represented as a blood-red five-pointed star, with the ‘horns of evil upwards, embracing the lower *manas*. It also symbolises the physical human being, with its desires and passions.

**The double**, *Liṅga śarīra*, coloured violet, as the vehicle of *Prāṇa*.

**Prāṇa**; life, coloured orange, the colour of the ascetic’s robes. *Prāṇa*, with its five pointed star pointing upwards, is also not a human principle, as it is omnipresent.

**The physical body**, *Sthūla śarīra*, is represented by the *māyāvic* contour of the large five-pointed star within the Auric egg. Quite differently from Western thought, HPB presents the physical body here as the material rind or shell of the Spiritual Person, and therefore, strictly, cannot be referred to as a ‘principle’.

**The Auric Egg**, coloured blue, is the chief ‘principle’, which contains all the principles of the human being.

### Remark:

The words *Antahkarana*, *māyāvic* and Auric Egg are first introduced here, as they are part of the figure. A further explanation can be found in the Glossary at the end of the book.

**Aspects: This thinking principle operates on two levels; higher and lower manas, two faces of the same principle.**

1. **Higher (buddhi-) manas** (higher self / wisdom mind). This form of pure thinking increases when it controls its passions (kāma) and is inspired by buddhi, when it develops its conscience and has selfless love for all. Talent for esotericism, abstract thinking, music and mathematics originate here.
2. **Lower (kāma-) manas** (lower self, desire mind). This stands for ordinary concrete daily thinking. It solves the daily problems, understands and organizes things. Is constantly in motion, has a tendency to scattering, restlessness, desire for sensations. Partly because of this, it is closely linked to kāma (emotion, desire and self-preservation). It always finds justifications for what we “want”. This combination of thought and feelings corresponds to Plato’s mortal soul (psyche). This is the domain of separateness, identification with the personality. Our desire mind does not know things as they are but only the reflections that are formed in our mind, as in the analogy of Plato’s cave. At best, it opens itself up to the higher aspects of manas.

## **Kāma**

Kāma has a strong influence on our thinking, it relates to desire in all its forms, of emotion, feeling, self-preservation. Because the reactions to these emotions, etcetera are sometimes intense, and always unreasonable, it has a bad reputation. Yet it is fundamental to life. Kāma appreciates the sensations of the senses as pleasant and unpleasant.

Under the influence of the mind (kāma-manas), a desire arises to repeat the pleasant, or to avoid the unpleasant, thereby creates (pre)judgments, blockages. As a result, we find it difficult to experience afresh new ideas and events. This aspect of our consciousness is also called the personality.

Characteristic for kāma is identification with, and strengthening of the personality, the ego. Actions bind us, limit us, lock us in. These also create the illusion that we are spiritually doing well, are advancing.

### Aspects: Kāma has three aspects:

1. **Will.** The will, as part of the emotional life, has a strong influence on our thinking. It is also the source of the will to live, of our motivation, and represents the divine will to do good, to create, to gain experience through it. If the motivation is well tuned, it responds to the sensations, but also resonates with the deepest intuition in us. In fact, it has two aspects, desire and emotion.
2. **Desire.** The essential nature of desire is the attraction of things that bring joy to a person and repulsion of those things that displease the person. This attracting and repelling shows the presence of power, which is essentially the same as willpower. There is therefore no essential difference between desire and will, since desire is in some respects only the reflection of the will on the emotional plane.
3. **Emotion.** Love or hate is the power of motivation, stimulates thoughts, drives action. Without it, man becomes inert.

### Desire and will, a fundamental difference

*In an article, H.P.B. explains the difference between desire and will.*

*“At the universal level, desire and will are indistinguishable kama. On the human level, however, there is distinction, and desire and will are opposing forces.*

*The difference is that ‘will’ comes from the divine, the god in man, while ‘desire’ is the motivating selfish force in material life. Most people are unable to tell the difference between desire and will, mistaking desire for will. Both desire and will are creative forces through which man shapes himself and his environment.*

*However, the person who wants to develop spiritually would do well to learn to distinguish desire from will. Desire should be curbed, but if it is given free rein, it will hang from one’s neck like a millstone in the form of karma.”*

*Collected Writings VIII, H.P. Blavatsky, page 109*

### Desire is originally the divine desire to do good

However, there is one form of desire (kama) that helps us move forward on our path and that is aspiration, the pursuit of spiritual development. Originally, kama is the divine desire to do good, to be compassionate and merciful, and comes from the heart. This divine desire is a force that allows the mind (manas) to be elevated from desire (kama) to spiritual inspiration (buddhi).

### **Vitality (Prana)**

Prana is the energy that permeates all creation, similar to the radiating power of ātman. It is an indispensable factor of the living human being.

An uninterrupted flow of prana is necessary for the health of body and mind. With a lack of sufficient prana, we would feel depressed and could get ill.

### **The etheric double** (*Linga Sharira, Sanskrit: distinctive shape*)

The vehicle of prana is a more delicate body, through which prana flows. It provides the model for the development of the physical body and is thus sometimes called 'the double', the model body or life body.

### **The physical body** (*Sthula Sharira*)

Our consciousness is closely linked to our physical body, the vehicle of all other principles throughout life. From a spiritual perspective, it is important not to identify with the body. We are not our body, we have a body, a vehicle that needs to be well maintained. It is from a stable body that we can develop spiritually, and therefore the monad (see hereunder) can express itself better.

### **Some concepts explained in more detail**

As has been said, it is precisely the interaction between the principles that is very important. These are often summarized under other concepts, which may be helpful for consideration.

### **The monad; the pilgrim.**

Ātman and buddhi need a vehicle, one might also say a catalyst, to be able to work in creation, just as the holy spirit transmits the impulse of the father to the son. Ātman's impulse is emitted by buddhi, its vehicle. Ātman and buddhi together therefore form a duality, referred to as the monad, also called the pilgrim. These two aspects of the One then give rise to the dualities of life and form. The monad itself is impersonal, without attributes, and thus of little use to us unless the divine impulse is absorbed and reflected by consciousness (manas). This thus creates the individuality.

## Personality and individuality

A seemingly very simple view of our consciousness is the distinction between individuality and personality.

It is the **personality** we identify with, that we think we are, as human beings.

The origin of the word persona (Greek: stage mask) already indicates that it is about appearances, a role that we play. The personality is formed by the world of involution, one might say. The world where the monad must play its part, where the pilgrim must go on their journey. However, that mundane world has become very dominant and seems to have taken over the “role-playing”.

If we observe ourselves closely, it turns out that this personality consists of a large number of sub-personalities, each playing their own role, whether or not influenced by aspects of kāma. The self-identification of the personality is culture-bound and is particularly strong. It does everything it can to avoid losing its control, not to allow room for individuality. It is precisely the identification with the personality that is one of the barriers on the spiritual path. Those who choose this path realize that they have to keep a close eye on the personality, with all its “tricks”. One of the pitfalls is that the strengthening personality on this path believes that it is making significant strides.

**The individuality** (Causal body) arises when consciousness (manas) is open to the influence of buddhi and can thus add uplifting experiences to the monad. In this way, the pilgrimage of the monad is enriched, on its way to a conscious



*At the beginning of this chapter HPB mentions that we function on different wave lengths. The waves of our consciousness are visible by clairvoyants. Desire exhibiting in this astral body is very much mind controlled. Compare to the figure in chapter 4. The yellow light circling the head represents the intellect.*

*C.W. Leadbeater, Man Visible and Invisible.*

reunion with the Absolute. The personality then becomes the servant of individuality, in the field of experience. Individuality does not include elements of personality.

Characteristic of actions motivated by individuality is that the results are liberating, healing, while actions from the personality are prejudicial, the results of which limit us, bind us, fix us.

### **A visualization exercise**

Visualise that you are standing in a town. The town represents your day-to-day life, with all its turmoils, attractions, repulsions etcetera. You then decide to go down to a quieter valley, which allows you to ponder about your life. Take some time to make this a clear picture.

At a given moment you are aware of a subtle longing, a calling, which makes you curious. You decide to leave the valley, approaching a river, with a rowing boat on the shore. You step into the boat and start rowing. You notice that you are frequently called back to your valley, with all its attractions, urgencies, but using your will you decide to go on. Then you arrive on the other shore, to a pathless land with a deep silence, where you are wandering around as an observer, without judgement. On a hill you see a small temple, which you enter. You experience a sacred atmosphere and you stay there for a while. It may be that you receive a message, an image, a few words, a letter or any other form of communication. You then decide to return and repeat the experience.

The boat trip proves a lot easier now, without resistance.

Being back in your valley and later your town, you still carry this sacred feeling, your message. This experience may enrich your life with qualities not to be found elsewhere. Here you end your visualisation.

### **Remark on the visualisation:**

The visualisation is a place you can always go to. You may prefer another route, other wording to be able to find the sacred place in your consciousness.

Take some time to find out, but be aware that your sacred place is not an escape room.

**Questions for consideration:**

1. Observe your personal contacts. Are they liberating, creative, or binding? The first case is an example of an experience from individuality, the second from the personality. One is not better than the other(!), both have their own function. It is important to observe the difference.
2. Do we have a free will? If so, how would you describe it? What aspects of your consciousness are involved?
3. Can you pinpoint a situation or experience where each of the different aspects of your consciousness was predominant over the rest?

*A student comes to a Zen teacher and asks for instruction.  
In response, the teacher pours a cup of tea, and continues to pour  
after the cup is full. The student shouts: 'Master stop, the cup is full!'*

*To which the teacher replies: 'So it is with instructions.'*

*They can't be given as long as your head is full.'*

# 4

## Karma and reincarnation

The word karma comes from Sanskrit and means action. In most world religions reference is made to the impact of action, such as:

“For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting”. (Paul, Gal. 6.8).

It is not clear whether such statements refer to the law of karma, and in particular in relationship with reincarnation. In theosophical literature, karma is referred to as “the highest law”, the source and origin of all other laws in the cosmos, the law of action-reaction. It is the cosmic law of cause and effect, which comes into effect physically, mentally and spiritually when harmony is disturbed. Simply put, karma is the law of restoring equilibrium, the driving force to eventually come to a state of complete harmony, both in the physical world and in the spiritual world. The law of karma is guided by extremely lofty intelligences, called Lipikas or Lords of Karma, as recorders of karmic actions. These angels are tasked with bringing about our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual evolution.

### What creates karma?

While karma is an impersonal law, it is in fact mankind who, through thoughts and the resulting actions, creates causes and thereby puts the law into effect. Theosophical research has shown that our thoughts create vibrations, forms, which have their own energy.

These thought forms, visible to clairvoyants, have a lasting life, depending on the energy put behind them. The most important aspect is above all the motive of the actions and thoughts. If thoughts and actions are based on harmony, benefitting the big picture, and is therefore selfless in nature, the effect will be harmonious (‘good karma’). But when the causes arise from a desire to obtain something for



*Notice that the background of the astral body is temporarily clouded by an onrush of feeling, whereas the strong and vivid thoughts, visual as fiery red splashes, exhibit malice and ill-will. The energy emitted creates karma. Source: C.W. Leadbeater, Man Visible and Invisible.*

personal gain, are selfish in nature, disrupting the law of harmony, the effect will be disharmonious ("bad karma").

### **The law encourages us to restore balance**

Karma is said to be the most difficult law to really understand. It is therefore advised to avoid easy judgments on karma of others. We can nevertheless learn how it works, by objectively observing our own lives. The law of karma always works in such a way that there is an impulse to restore harmony and maintain balance at every level. Objectively, the law is based on wisdom, compassion and love. This means a profound educational process that matures the personal human being into a spiritual person. Every thought and action have the corresponding effect. Karma will have a negative effect if acted from a selfish motive, while the great law of harmony is based on altruism.

### **The universal law works at all levels**

Karma is a universal law that restores everything in balance, not only on an individual level, but also on groups, organizations, nations, continents and the world as a whole. The suffering of the world, the class distinctions, the unequal treatment of men, women and children, the unequal distribution of work and capital is undoubtedly linked to karma. As explained in the second chapter, the basic principle in theosophical teachings is the Oneness of all existence. This means that each individual and everything that exists is an inseparable part in the Oneness and is therefore also inextricably linked to what happens in the bigger picture. It also shows us that we cannot detach ourselves from collective suffering and its resolution. Whatever happens in the world, every individual is connected to it as a global citizen, and is partly responsible. At the same time, when an individual rises above their own personal shortcomings, it has an effect on the total. The idea that we are a separate part of the big picture is an illusion. Actually, such separateness is a major illusion and also creates karma.

### **Evolution is always forward**

In the process of evolution, there is always an aspiration forward. The monad –the pilgrim– goes through a development in all the realms of nature: through the mineral kingdom, the plant kingdom and the animal kingdom, after which the development continues in a human form to finally reach the divine state. In esoteric philosophy, it is made clear that there is never a backward move

ment. Thus, when the human stage of development is reached, there will be no relapse to the lower stage of animal development. Even though in the universe everything falls under the law of karma, there is only causal karma in the human kingdom because only human beings have a mind and therefore have a moral sense, which makes each person responsible for their actions and therefore their karma.

### Which states of consciousness relate to karma?

As explained in the former chapter, there are two composite aspects in human beings: the mortal personality and the higher, divine, impersonal individuality. The spiritual part consists of the spiritual inspiration (buddhi) and the wisdom mind (buddhi manas). Ātman as a ray of the Universal does not in fact belong



Annie Besant and  
C.W. Leadbeater, *Thought Forms*.

to the spiritual part but is an inseparable ray of the universal or One Self, the Absolute. Neither ātman nor buddhi are affected by karma.

From the moment humankind was endowed in the evolutionary process with the mind, manas, the individual is responsible for own thoughts and actions, for all the merits and shortcomings of the personality, and thus karma.

Buddhi and manas together, through the karmic impulse, connect with the personality in each incarnation, experienced on earth.

### Karma and reincarnation

The law of karma is inextricably linked to that of reincarnation. The fact that karma works over and through many lifetimes makes life understandable.

Every individuality in successive births is shaped by characteristic traits built up in past lives. These characteristic properties, called skandhas, are the vibrations of the different groups of mental, emotional, psychic and physical characteristics. These vibrations are constantly subject to change during a lifetime, among other things due to progressive insight, experiences and aging.

After death, a period of rest follows and the skandhas remain on the threshold of the celestial world, devachan, until the time has come for a new incarnation, a new period of activity.

## A new incarnation is the result of past lives

Whether the new personality will then be born with the accompanying karmic consequences of past lives, but also the circumstances of the birth itself, depends to a large extent on the law of karma. Karma is the guiding force, the result of the thinking and actions of the past life, and from the 'old' skandhas the new qualities emerge which form the new personality. In fact,

we create our own reality, are the product of our own thinking, and create our own destiny, future and future lives. We ourselves are

responsible. A life is always the effect of one or more past lives. It is the laws of karma and reincarnation that allow us to become aware of our own influence on these cosmic laws. Karma and reincarnation are the tools used by the pilgrim souls for growth. (More about reincarnation in the next chapter.)



*Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater, Thought Forms.*

## Can karma be changed?

In a chapter on karma, it seems logical that the question arises whether karma can be changed. While the law itself cannot be made more positive or rendered inoperative, we can influence the karma of the present and future through insight and our choices today, a process of inner transformation. Everything must be acquired through one's own effort, both on an individual and collective level. In this context, it is important to note that esoteric teachings state that consciously solving a single bad cause will not only solve one but a multitude of bad consequences. We have the opportunity, by observing ourselves in the light of our higher spiritual self, to know the workings of the mind.

We can thereby refine and transform our thinking in such a way that it connects with buddhi, the intelligent guiding force. Thus, we are helped to realize the universal brotherhood of humanity so that every human being can live in freedom and equality. This spiritual inspiration can enable each one of us to go the right way, in harmony with universal laws.

### **Clear examples: Germany and South Africa**

A clear example is how Germany responded to the heavy karma created during WW II. The country as a whole went through a process of honest inner search, with all its emotional and mental aspects. It took its full responsibility, trying to make good where possible. As a result, while karma is still there, as the past cannot be changed, karma no doubt has lost a lot of its energy. A crucial change. Another example is South Africa under Nelson Madela, where Archbishop Desmond Tutu chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These exemplary ways of dealing with karma are unfortunately rare among countries, but these shining examples may well apply to our personal lives. The energy we create through actions which are not harmonious, causing karma, can become much softer, when we take full responsibility of our actions, and go through the related emotional and mental process. Then, if possible, we should try to make good. The Great Hermetic Axiom from chapter 2 also refers to the relationship between Inner and Outer, Great and Small processes; "As the Inner, so is the Outer, As is the Great, so is the Small".

### **Questions for consideration**

1. Do you recognize part of the German /South African example in your own life? How did you deal with it?
2. Good karma is in line with harmony with the divine plan of evolution. Try to gain insight into the universal laws through study and meditation.
3. Observe how you act, inwardly and outwardly, instead of constantly following the outer impulses.
4. Do you find the law of karma as limiting you or liberating you? Has this affected your behaviour, and how will it affect your way of acting in the future?
5. Have you any skills or talents you suspect may be from past lives?
6. Do you now feel more responsible for your life?
7. What lessons are you learning in this life, what are you denying?
8. Think again about how you originally thought about the concept of karma. Do you now take a different view on this important concept?
9. What would you recognize in your own life as elements of karma, where balance needs to be restored?
10. How do you experience the driving force behind karma? Is that power loving, or is it hard to recognize?

# 5

## Between Death and Birth

### **An afterlife: Is the desire the father of thought?**

The process of birth, growth, full flowering, decay and death is one of the great cycles of life, that occur at every level in nature, from atom to universe. In nature, life and death are recognizable. Processes do not suddenly arise from nothing and disappear into nothingness. Something is already inherently present, something remains, usually at a different level of abstraction. The spiritual traditions indicate that this is also the case with human life, that on another level there is a certain survival after death. One may wonder whether this “promise” is not motivated by our fundamental desire that after death there should be “something” left of ourselves and our loved ones. This “something” then goes to heaven, or goes through a lengthy process of reincarnations. This return to earth can both be in line with a human desire, as well as the desire that we have been an important person in previous incarnations. How many “Napoleons” or “Cleopatras” are walking around now? That would even imply that they are declining in importance! However, this has nothing to do with spirituality. The journey of the soul has to do with inner growth and not with status. Theosophy examines this subject from a profound spiritual perspective, and makes critical comments on superficial needs.

### **Near-death experiences**

There are people who have undergone near-death experiences. These have similarities with what theosophical research shows us. Quite generally, the first experience is that of a dark compaction or tunnel, often with a shining light at the end of it. One then finds oneself in a world of light and freedom in which a “being of light” is perceived, exhibiting perfect understanding and love. Most of the time, a deep sense of peace and well-being is experienced. Consciousness could then refocus from a spiritual perspective, while the physical body is often perceived in a detached way, sometimes with beloved ones around and doctors busy with the body. Often a quick overview of present lives is observed. Many understand that they have to return to finish certain things in this incarnation.

### **The dying process: the esoteric view**

The esoteric traditions teach that consciousness goes through a process of several stages after death before incarnating again. At the moment of death, the “silver thread” breaks between the physical body and the other aspects of consciousness. The three lower principles, the physical body, the principle of life (prana), and its vehicle (the astral body) are gone. For a few seconds, our life passes by our inner eye. The strongest thoughts when dying would affect future existence.



*The dying process.*

### **Towards the astral plane of feelings**

The other aspects of consciousness, when separated from the physical body, pass to the astral plane. This is the semi-physical, feeling-oriented world, invisible to us. It has strong dynamic powers which includes desires. The emotional experiences in this astral plane are even more intense than during life, freed from the dampening vibrations of matter. On the one hand, this can mean that desires are experienced here in a more intense form, on the other hand, it is also a place of great creativity. It is said that one finds oneself in an environment much in line with preferences during life. Artists create the most beautiful art, spiritually inclined people meet with inspiring persons at uplifting places, travelers visit places they always wanted to visit, etcetera. A purification process gradually takes place until the energy contained therein is extinguished. That takes time, especially if the feelings have been intense. Those who have lived relatively pure lives seem to be able to help others during this process of purification.

### **The second death**

After this purification process, the second death takes place, separating the valuable and less valuable elements of our consciousness. The “astral shell” of the emotional world, and the thoughts influenced by it (kama manas) gradually evaporates, for it cannot exist independently for long without the three higher

principles, âtman, buddhi and buddhi-manas. These shells are the “spirits” that mediums can come into contact with. In fact, this is highly undesirable, because this shell, which contains only certain aspects of the personality, is artificially maintained by it.

### **What do we take with us?**

The continuation of the remaining states of consciousness depends on how we have lived spiritually. Aspects of our personality (thinking, feeling, emotion) that have been transformed into spiritual experiences remain part of the monad. The monad (âtman-buddhi), enriched with these pure aspects of thinking from the unity of life (buddhi manas) pass into the planes of consciousness indicated by devachan.

On the other hand, if there is no conscious “bridge” made between personality and the monad, through which the monad gained relevant experiences, one would in fact not speak of a conscious incarnation. Then after death, little remains of the experiences of the past personality. To use a metaphor: the drop has merged back into the ocean and the ocean has formed a new drop, little having changed. Opinions differ as to whether the latter is the rule or the exception. According to some researchers, most people lead an unconscious, “soul-less”, life, so that no positive experiences are taken into account, other researchers believe that there are almost always positive impressions to “take away”.

### **Rest in devachan, the world of heaven**

In devachan, all ties to lower states of consciousness have been abandoned. The monad is in a blissful, “heavenly” environment. It is surrounded with all its virtues and good intentions without the disturbing elements of personality. Over time, the urge arises to gain experience in the world again. We begin a new cycle through a new birth in a new physical body. We are drawn to circumstances created in previous incarnations. In devachan, the experiences of past lives have been assimilated and carried into the next, again “fertilized” by the higher ideals during devachan.

### **Time between death and new incarnation**

The process between two incarnations can be very short (in young children or premature death) but also very long, said to be even 3000 years. The length varies greatly per individual, depending on how they lived. Time exists only

at the level of thought, so there is no such thing under those conditions, in the way we know it. The growth inherent in the reincarnation process is important, discussions about time are in fact irrelevant.

### **Universal love endures**

Pure, spiritual love does not only come from the human heart, but is rooted in eternity. This love is immortal because it is the creative force that makes consciousness and matter one. That love can be touched when the desire of personality is not involved. It is the aspect of buddhi, of love-wisdom, of the true intelligence of the unity of life. Such love has a magical, divine power, which returns to the living. According to H.P. Blavatsky, karma means that all who feel such love for each other are born into the same family or group of friends.

### **Memories of past lives?**

People sometimes think they have memories of a past existence. These often come across as very authentic. There are also memories of past lives that have actually been proven. Nevertheless, a critical comment must be made here.

It is precisely the theosophical teachings that indicate that after death elements of consciousness persist for some time as astral shell, while the monad has “passed on” to devachan. Memories of past lives can just as easily consist of psychic contact with these shells on the astral, matter-bound level, and thus do not have to tell anything about our own past lives.

Perhaps we should be glad that we don't remember our past lives, with all its problems. Our current life already gives us enough challenges to work with. The reincarnation is important for our personal growth, which determines our future. Digging into past lives may satisfy our curiosity, but it contributes little to a spiritual life.

### **Helping around the time of death**

It is important that we can assist the departing soul at the moment of death by allowing the transition to take place in the calmest and most peaceful atmosphere possible. We can help those who have passed on in their further journey through loving meditation or prayers. The Tibetan Book of the Dead and other texts explain that it becomes more difficult for the deceased to adapt to this new phase if we continue to hold on to the deceased by lingering in grief and mourning. It is natural to feel sadness, even unhealthy to suppress it. Those who

see death as part of the normal cycle of birth and death, believing in the progression of consciousness after life, find that their grief gradually diminishes.

### **Preparation helps in the ‘final initiation’**

It makes sense to have a picture of the process of death. Information from the esoteric traditions is helpful. The expectations of the person dying appear to have a major influence on the experiences after death. The dying process could be compared to an initiation. After all, an initiation means a new phase with a clearer picture of the workings of the universal laws. We can make this process easier by preparing for it, by living a life that takes into account change, to be open for the deeper, eternal aspects of being human. However, if people in their lifetime firmly believe that there is no life after death, then they will take those thoughts with them and thereby make the process more complex. Meditation can help us to strengthen our contact with our true inner self and facilitate this transition.

### **Birth is a new creation**

The esoteric tradition is less extensive about birth, but there are clear similarities with the creation of cosmos and mankind. It indicates that an impulse is being sent, around which material gathers of karma of past lives, the skandhas.

Then the monad waits for a suitable vehicle for the lessons of a new life.

Just before birth, the monad gets a vision of the coming life. The potencies of the skandhas influence the circumstances of the new incarnation and are gradually assimilated into the character, the personality of the new individual.

One of the theosophical ideas is that, within the constraints of karma and skandhas, the monad can make choices regarding the environment of birth, even its own parents. In addition, parents would receive inspiration to find the right name for the new incarnation.

Researchers have different views about the moment consciousness makes contact with the new body; during conception, birth or later. In line with the creation process, it seems plausible that this is a gradual process, that aspects of the personality are constantly “incarnating”. This can also be observed after the birth of a child. The process is not completed until around the seventh year, when the child has a greatly increased self-awareness, thus giving rise to the personal self.



*During birth, angels assist for every individual in the dual process of the construction of the new bodies.*

*Geoffrey Hodson.  
Kingdom of the Gods.*

### **Summary: the great journey**

According to esoteric tradition, we are individual sparks of the One Flame, the Source from which we come and to which we return. Tradition teaches that between lives the soul extracts the essence from its past life experiences and assimilates them. Eventually, the soul will return as a conscious entity to the great Source or indwelling Spirit. Every life on earth brings us closer to the end of the journey, when the individual soul will have freed itself from the cycles of birth and death.

*“The individuality plays, like an actor, many parts on the stage of life. Let us call every new life on earth of the same Ego (Soul) a night on the stage of a theatre. One night the actor or “Ego” (Soul) appears as “Macbeth”, the next as “Shylock”,*

*the third as "Romeo", the fourth as "Hamlet" or "King Lear", and so on, until he has run through the whole cycles of incarnations. The Ego (Soul) begins his life-pilgrimage as a spirit, an "Ariel", or a "Puck", he plays the part of a super, is a soldier, a servant, one of the chorus, rises then to "speaking parts", plays leading roles, interspersed with insignificant parts, till he finally retires from the stage as "Prospero" the magician."*

*H.P. Blavatsky. The Key to Theosophy, page 24*

### **Questions for consideration**

1. Try to find out why your life turned out the way it did, if there could be a reason for the circumstances in which you were born.
2. How could this way of looking at things, from a bigger picture or perspective, bring a sense of hope for the future?
3. As mentioned, our thoughts and aspirations during life influence the first phase after death. Try to visualize what you would like to take with you, to experience, when you are no longer limited by your current physical environment.

## Glossary of terms used

**Antaḥkaraṇa** (Sanskrit Antaḥ: internal, karaṇa: instrument).

Explanation of the term varies according to the school. H.P. Blavatsky described it as follows: “Antaḥkaraṇa is that part of lower manas which is one with the Higher, the essence that which retains its purity; on it are impressed all good and noble aspirations, and in it are the upward energies of the lower manas, the energies and tendencies which become its Devachanic experiences.”

### **Astral body**

The aspect of (human) consciousness related to feelings, emotions. Vehicle for the kāma or desire principle in man. By clairvoyants it is often observed as “radiant”, or astralis in Latin.

### **Astral plane**

Situated immediately above the physical plane, the plane between the first and second death, where “material” is collected between devachan and the building of a new personality before birth.

### **Astral shell**

The astral remnant of the dead after the “second death”, when the consciousness withdraws to devachan. For some time, it still holds parts of the memory of the person after death.

**Ātman** (Sanskrit, ātman: self). Derived either from an- “to breathe” aṭ- “to move” or vā “to blow.”

The breath of life, the universal spirit in nature and in our own being, the matrix in the universe. In the Upanishads, ātman is identified as the basic conscious principle in man, and identical with Brahman, the underlying reality of the manifested universe.

### **Ātman-Buddhi**

The expression ātman-buddhi is used to describe the twofold human spirit. See monad.

## **Auric Egg**

Blavatsky only referred to the Auric Egg for the first time in her esoteric instructions, as she said it was very sacred. It contains all the principles of the human being. It preserves every Karmic record, the storehouse of all the good and bad powers. It is the silver 'thread' stringing upon itself the pearls of human existence. In other words, the spiritual aroma of every personality, it follows through the pilgrimage of life.

**Buddhi** (Sanskrit, bud: to awaken, perceive, learn).

Buddhi, the veil of ātman, manifests as spiritual intuition, insight, understanding, far deeper and subtler than our reasoning faculty. It also manifests as the voice of conscience, the sense of harmony, beauty, truth. When it is reflected through the intellect, it appears as wisdom, when reflected through the higher aspect of the emotional vehicle, it has the quality of spiritual love which itself embraces wisdom.

**Devachan** (Tibetan, bde ba can: peaceful, state of bliss).

In Pure Land Buddhism, devachan is called Sukhāvāṭī, i.e. "Happy Land", or the "Western Paradise", a place of happiness between two incarnations. We can see therefore that this state is not identical with the permanent state of heaven of orthodox Christianity. An alternative unverified etymology is that the term is derived from deva, god, angel and Tibetan chan, region, land, or country). A literal translation would be "place of the gods," although the Tibetan would more literally be "having the nature of happiness."

**Esoteric** (Greek, esō-: within).

Inner teachings or knowledge, as opposed to teachings for the masses called exoteric knowledge. Term generally used to be applied to doctrines designed for an inner circle of disciples for spiritual or religious disciplines.

**Kāma** (Sanskrit, kām: desire, long for, wish, sensual love).

In theosophical literature, kāma is usually related to manas and indicating a desire-mind or emotionally charged thoughts. As such, a faculty for the development of our consciousness.

**Karma** (Sanskrit, कर्म, Pāli, kamma: action, work).

In its most basic sense, it is the law of action and reaction.

**Lipikas** (Sanskrit, lip: to write).

Celestial beings, recorders of karmic actions, often called Lords of Karma.

**Manas** (Sanskrit, manas: mind, thinking).

Manas is dual in nature and has been divided into “higher” and “lower” manas.

Whereas higher manas receives input from the spiritual intuition (buddhi), the lower manas is the thinking faculty that is an interface between consciousness and the exterior physical world.

Manas is one of the most fundamental aspects of our consciousness to our understanding of the laws surrounding the progressions of the human “life-wave” as it continues its pilgrimage.

**Monad** (Greek, monos: solitary).

In theosophical literature it is used for a unit of consciousness, or an entity with respect to karma. The monad is often seen as equivalent to ātman-buddhi within human beings. The monad uses a vehicle (buddhi), as contrasted to pure ātman, which cannot act or interact on the lower planes.

**Māyāvic** (Sanskrit māyā: illusion, deception).

So, the māyāvic contour can be described as the illusionary, temporary outer shell, the physical body, opposite to the Reality of the Auric Egg.

**Sanskrit** (Sanskrit, Saṃskṛta: well-made, refined, civilised, shining).

The word “Sanskrit” is an English word. Sometimes Sanskrit is called the mother of all the Indo-European languages. During Vedic times (c. 3000-1500 BCE), it was a living language in the Indian subcontinent, now spoken only by pandits and enthusiasts. Its script is called devanāgarī, a feminine noun meaning “writing of the divine city”.

**Skandhas** (Sanskrit skandha, Pāli, khandha : stem or trunk of a tree).

Skandha may be defined as the groups of attributes which unite at birth, and in their aggregation constitute the personality. Generally, the world is used as group of five (or seven) related constituents of human nature, which in Sanskrit and Pāli are:

- (S, P) rūpa (form, often translated “body”).
- (S, P) vedanā (feeling).
- (S) samjñā, (P) saññā (perception).
- (S) saṃskāra, (P) saṅkhāra (impressions, predispositions).
- (S) vijñāna, and (P) viññāna (conditioned or ordinary consciousness).

In theosophical literature it is suggested that there are actually seven, each relating to the seven planes in nature. The additional two pertain to the spiritual parts of the human constitution, ātman and buddhi.

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The site contains a lot of background information, including courses as well as a list of all international sections and centres.

The Theosophist: <https://www.ts-adyar.org/book-store>

### **Social media pages:**

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### **World Federation of Young Theosophists**

Site: [www.wfyf.org](http://www.wfyf.org)

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### **Resource centre**

[www.theosophy.world](http://www.theosophy.world)

Site has been established to have a global online resource centre which contains helpful theosophical material that is easily accessible.

### **On line magazine**

[www.theosophyforward.com](http://www.theosophyforward.com)

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## An introduction of subjects related to our own spiritual life

Theosophical investigators studied an infinite range of subjects, based on their vision of the eternal wisdom.

The writers of this book particularly selected those subjects which have impact on our daily life.

These theosophical ideas have been described in short chapters. The aim of this book is to encourage further enquiry. Chapters therefore end with questions for consideration.



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