

The Spiritual Layers of Man

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Once in the mountains, a landslide started rumbling towards us. I cried. "We are going to die!"

My master said: "Who can kill the eternal?"

from: Living with the Himalayan Masters, by Swami Rama

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1. Introduction

Since the beginning of mankind, man has wondered who he is, what he is doing here, and where he is going after death. He looked at the outer world and fell in awe before the forces of nature. He looked inside and discovered that he was more than a physical body. He experimented with plants and with meditation, and found that he and his environment also existed on other levels of consciousness. He passed on his knowledge orally and later he wrote down his experiences. Thus his fellow human beings and their descendants could learn about this, and on the basis hereof interpret their own experiences.

At present we live in society where the emphases is on material gain and security, by which the other facets of life, namely the spiritual, have been well suppressed. Nevertheless people continue to experience states of existence, and facets of life, other than the material. From this I have gathered information to present you

with an overview of the makeup of man, the different planes of existence available to him, and the continuing of his life after the transition we call death. It is essential to your well-being to know who you are and what happens after death. We all share the gift of living, so we should know who we are; and we all share the same destiny in this life, so we should know what is death. Human beings like to interpret, categorize and label their experiences. Nature, or life, do not do that. Bear in mind that what follows is an attempt to make the information understandable and clear. Every interpretation, categorization and labeling is artificial and should not be taken as the unmistakable truth. They are like sign posts, giving you an idea what you are about.

2.The Bodies of man

2.1. The Basic Trinity of Man

The most basic distinction we can make in regards to the make-up of man is that he consists of a personality, an individuality and a divine essence.

The personality is the lower self, consisting of the physical body and the psychic soul. It has the genetics of its forefathers, the energy system to keep the physical body alive, and the psychological and psychic characteristics that define us as human. He has the abilities to express himself through thought, language, and other intellectual capacities. The personality is a unit of incarnation, it is all those bodies and all those characteristics you have taken on for this incarnation. As it belongs to the world of form, it is temporary. It was created to express yourself in this world on a temporary basis. When you die, the personality dissolves. The experiences you have gained during your lifetime are then being absorbed by your individuality.

The individuality is the higher self. It is the unit of evolution. It does not die but remains the same throughout the many incarnations. It learns from all the experiences in those incarnations. While the personality often does not know why it incarnated, as with every birth memory of the past has been wiped out, the individuality has an overview of all incarnations, and of the meaning of everything that happens to the person. Eventually the individuality will go back into the Divine.

The divine essence is what man always has been, at this moment is, and always will be. Each living being is a part of the Divine. It is often compared with a star, or a light spark. Although it seems that each living being is a separate light spark in this universe of darkness, our divine essence links us all together, as in the Divine there is no distinction, only unity prevails. Our divine essence does not know duality, only unity. Our language is too limited to express the Divine, but we try it anyway and thus we say that the Divine, and our divine essence, is perfect, immortal, eternal, unchangeable, formless and so on. The individuality and personality are not perfect, mortal, temporal, subjected to change, have form and so on.

2.2 The Bodies of Man

There are several systems, doctrines, and philosophies that have their own classification and names for the different bodies of man. Aside from some minor details they all fit together in the following basic schematic.

The physical body

The astral body

The mental body

The spiritual body

All these bodies belong to the world of creation, and thus are temporal. They have form and each has a specific function that allows man to express himself in the world.

2.3 The Physical Body

The physical body allows man to express himself in the physical world. It is built out of cells, molecules and atoms, and it needs food to survive. It is the most crystallized of all bodies, and the most dense. The physical body is male or female, and this polarity plays an immense role in the life of man.

The physical body is kept alive and structured by the ethereal body. The ethereal body is often seen as a separate body, but it is actually a template, a matrix for the physical body. The physical atoms, molecules and cells arrange themselves according to the structure of the ethereal body. The ethereal matrix looks like a web of energy lines, like light fibers which attract physical matter and arrange it into a physical body. You can say that the physical body is a duplicate of the ethereal body. Did you know that with children, when a piece of a finger got cut off, the entire finger will grow back again (for some reason this ability gets lost in later years). How do the cells know how to structure themselves in order to grow a new finger? It is because they follow the ethereal matrix along which they align themselves. In primitive animals, like salamanders, this ability remains for their entire life. They will grow a new limb, or tail, easily. The ethereal body is responsible for the pain of so-called phantom limbs. It has been a medical mystery for a long time, that when a limb has been amputated, the patient will feel pain in this limb that actually is not there anymore. The pain is often long lasting. In the light of the above we can explain this pain in phantom limbs.

Although the physical limb has gone, the ethereal counterpart is still there. The surgical removal of that limb created an immense trauma on the body. In normal circumstances traumas settle themselves on muscles, creating muscle spasms which in turn creates pain. As the physical body by itself is inert, the trauma always happens on the level of the ethereal body, which will pass on the trauma to the physical body, mostly to the muscles. In the case of an amputated limb, the trauma is still in the ethereal counterpart of that limb, and thus pain is felt. It just does not have the ability to express itself on the physical level. People have successfully removed this 'phantom' pain by methods of relaxation, hypnosis and energy work.

Although the physical body can lose parts or can be deformed during the course

of a lifetime, the ethereal body always remains the same. The only change that can happen to the ethereal body is constriction on the energy flow through its fibers (also called nadis). This will result in ailments and diseases in the physical body. When the nadis are 'cleared', or the constriction of them lifted, by energy healing of one kind or another, the physical ailments or diseases will disappear. The ethereal body absorbs the solar and lunar pranas (subtle energies) and transforms them into the necessary life energies for the physical body. They keep the physical body not only alive but also healthy. The ethereal body acts especially on the muscles, and with the ethereal body we experience time. The physical body, as it is composed of physical matter is by itself inert. It is through the ethereal body that we feel pain, suffering, hunger, thirst and other 'physical' comforts or discomforts.

2.4 The Astral Body

The astral body is the body that allows us the experience of emotions, lust, instincts, desires and so on.

The astral body does not have organs, although it takes on a form similar to the physical body. It is composed of little astral particles which are in constant movement. The astral body takes up these astral particles from its astral environment and then 'breathes' them out again. The astral can take any shape, but usually it takes the form of the physical body of the present or last incarnation as consciousness has gotten used to identifying itself with this form. It is called 'astral' body because it glitters like stars when observed clairvoyantly.

2.5 The Mental Body

The mental body allows us the experience of thoughts, thinking, and rational processes. The intellect. It still has a form, but not necessarily a human form. Its form is abstract and geometrical, although it can take on an apparent physical form to make oneself recognizable on the lower levels of existence.

The mental body cannot think by itself, as it does not have a consciousness by it own. It is more like an automatic body that stores information and transfers what it receives.

The mental body is sometimes divided into two:

The lower mental body: which is the seat of practical thinking

The higher mental body, also called the causal body: which is the level of abstract thinking, and which contains the causes of everything that manifest in the lower bodies and worlds. It contains the knowledge of all past and present incarnations, and the roots of and possibilities of future incarnations. It is the gateway to universal knowledge and spiritual development. Although some authors make a distinction between the causal body and the spiritual body, there are probably one and the same.

2.6. The Spiritual Body

The spiritual body allows us to experience the highest forms of human manifestation. We could call it a cosmic body and it is close to divine realm. It is not a real body as it is not subjected to form. On this level the ego ceases to exist. One is free of duality and its constructs. Here is the experience of oneness of everything that exists.

The spiritual body knows all things, lives in utmost purity, and gathers true, divine knowledge. Its energy vivifies and nourishes all the other bodies of man.

3.The Spheres of Existence

As man has different bodies, each body belongs to a particular sphere of existence, or world. All the bodies are functioning constantly, whether we are aware of them or not. In the daytime, consciousness is centered in the physical body and the physical world. At night, when the physical body rests, consciousness withdraws and shifts to the astral level. Then consciousness is centered in the astral body and can move around in the astral world. Usually it stays just 'outside' the physical body and dreams. Occasionally it wanders around in the astral world, has a short visit to the mental world, or converses with other astral beings.

With traumas or accidents consciousness can suddenly shift to the astral body. There are many reports of people who suddenly left their physical body and saw its condition from an eagle's point of view. In the last decades a lot of attention has been given to the so-called near-death-experiences. People died, went out of their body and had certain experiences in the astral world, which they were able to tell when they were brought back to life. Some people are able to deliberately shift their consciousness to the astral level, while remaining conscious. We usually call this out-of-the-body-experiences.

It is obvious that man's consciousness can shift to other levels of existence by shifting his awareness to his other bodies and thus he is able to experience the respective world. From people who have done this, we have gained information about these worlds. The following is a short overview.

3.1 The Physical World

The physical world is the most familiar of all world as we spend most of our conscious life in it. The physical world is the most crystallized and most dense of all the world. It allows us to act and work with many different kind of energies, circumstances, actions, and learn a lot about life in the universe. The physical world allows us to evolve. It is not only the residence of physical beings like humans, but there are many non-physical beings which are living in and working through the physical world.

3.2 The Astral World

The astral world has many levels and places, which are the result of man's consciousness, but the astral world by itself has certain characteristics.

The light in the astral world is not like we know in the physical world. It is a kind of spiritual light that is much brighter and sparkling, although it depends on what level you are. Time and space is also not the same as we know in the physical world. The astral time and space is different. Astral time is the succession of actions and is relative. When you go from one place to another, one will go faster or slower depending on how fast or slow one wishes to go. This means that one can go to any other place in an instant if one wishes that.

As the astral world takes on the form projected by man's consciousness, it is no wonder that the astral world is like a duplicate of this world. There are landscapes, flowers, trees, road, buildings. The astral environment is constantly created by the people living in that world. As people in the astral world (most of them have died on the physical level) tend to group together according to their inner state of being, we find many different environments, landscapes, cities and so on, on the astral level. Thus we have heavens and hells, and paces in between. Heaven and hell are not fixed places created by God, but places created by the mind of the people themselves. We create our own heaven or hell by the way we are living, feeling and thinking, and by our actions.

As the astral world is a reflection of the inner state of mind, there is only one language, and that is mind communication. You might call it telepathy if you want to. As the body does not have organs, but it composed of uniform astral matter, one does not have to actually speak to communicate, nor does one has a need to eat or drink, or smell, and so on, but the habits of the previous life on the physical plane are still so strong that when people die and arrive in the astral world, they will continue their habits.

The astral substance is a plastic medium, and is often symbolized by the element of Water. It is both substance and movement, and in constant vibration. It is twofold, androgynous in nature depending on the degree of polarization. It is volatile and fixed, it attracts and repels, it is negative and positive. It looks for equilibrium between the two poles of duality.

Peter Richelieu, in his book, *A Soul's Journey*, speaks of seven astral spheres. From his description it seems that they corresponds with the different types of heavens described by other authors.

The first sphere looks like a copy of the physical world, where the inhabitants live more or less the same life as they did when they were still living in the physical world.

The second sphere is more created by the thoughts of the inhabitants, but they have the same life style as in the first sphere.

In the third sphere they are instructed in and taught the many arts, crafts and so on.

In the fourth sphere we find artists who work by themselves, medical people who do research, students who exchange ideas...There are also mental hospitals for those who still have mental problems because of their passing over.

In the fifth and sixth sphere there are researchers like psychoanalysts, specialists, philosophers, mystics who meditate, and religious people.

In the seventh sphere there are no buildings. The inhabitants live in mediation, in seclusion, in silence. Usually they used to be monks and the like in their previous life on earth.

When one sheds the astral body one goes over to the mental world.

These seven astral spheres correspond loosely with the old terms of Morning Land and Summer Land. Morning Land are those astral spheres that have nice landscapes, with trees, a brilliant sun, and where inhabitants live in love for each other. Summer Land are those areas where the colors are much brighter and more plentiful. The inhabitants here are divided in groups, each has the sign of their order on their robe. Each order embodies a particular mental concept. The lower astral spheres usually serve to receive the newly deceased who need time to adjust to their new environment.

In the very low astral spheres are the so-called hells. Here are the inhabitants who are still stuck in their negative habits, emotions and thoughts. They just cannot let go of it, and thus create their own hell, void of heavenly light that might liberate them from the vicious circle they are in.

None of these spheres of existence are eternal. So forget the eternal damnation to hell, or eternal delight in the heavens that certain religions preach. There is no stagnation in the universe, everything evolves, and every living being will eventually reach the Light.

3.3 The Mental World

The inhabitants in the mental world do not appear in bodily forms, but more as thought forms, the appearance of which depends on their mental development. On the physical and astral level life forms express themselves in well defined forms. This is not the case on the mental level. Here life forms are more abstract. Inhabitants usually wear a robe or mantle of white light.

When an inhabitant of the astral realms sheds its astral body, it goes immediately to that mental sphere that corresponds with the state of his inner being. Peter Richelieu again divides the mental realm into seven spheres. In the first and second sphere, one is in space and perceives all directions at the same time. We can call this spherical perception. The inhabitants have low mental development and appear as nebulous forms. The higher the mental sphere the more defined the mental 'form' is. On the mental level one can hear any music just by making a thought form of the movement of the music.

3.3 The Causal or Spiritual World

When the mental body has been shed, one arrives at the causal or spiritual world. Peter Richelieu says that this world comprises the sixth and seventh mental spheres. Here, past, present and future are one. At the causal level one is shown a full record of his past lives, pointing out where he failed and where he excelled, and what needs to be done in a next life to straighten things out. Then he must enter a physical body again.